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A century of theatrical history

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A Century of Theatrical History.

1816 - 1916.

The "Old Vic."

BY

JOHN BOOTH.

STEAD'S PUBLISHING HOUSE,
Bank Buildings, Kingsway, W.C.2.
1917.

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A Century of Theatrical History.

CHAPTER I.

The Opening of the Royal Coburg Theatre.

UPON the second anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo the Prince Regent and the Duke of Wellington, with a staff of officers who had seen service upon that memorable day, rode across Waterloo Bridge. It was the formal inauguration of a work which had been in active proposal and under construction for just eight years, and Canova, the great Italian sculptor, presently hailed it as "the noblest bridge in the world," and declared it "alone worth coming from Rome to London to see."

The building of Waterloo Bridge naturally had an important effect upon the area around the foot of the bridge on the Southern bank of the river, and it was not very long before the improved means of communication prompted the erection of a theatre at the corner of Waterloo-road and the New Cut, Lambeth; a situation which had the further advantage in the eyes of theatrical speculators and promoters that it lay outside the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain. The promoters in this particular case were James Jones, the lessee of the Surrey Theatre, and Dunn, who rented the Surrey from the trustees in Jones' bankruptcy. The ground landlord of the Surrey was Temple West, and when the lease had nearly expired on Lady Day, 1816, Jones and Dunn went to him with a proposal that they should become yearly tenants at an annual rental of £600. West declined the proposal, and demanded £4,200 for what had produced under the existing lease no more than two hundred guineas. Jones and Dunn refused to pay, and determined to build a new theatre for themselves. In

this scheme they were joined by John Thomas Serres, son of the Dominic Serres, who was a foundation member of the Royal Academy. The younger Serres invested two thousand pounds in building the theatre, and not very long afterwards became insolvent; but as Marine Painter to the King he had some little influence at Court, and he succeeded in obtaining permission to name the new house The Royal Coburg Theatre. This was an astute move, because Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, after whom the theatre was called, was the bridegroom of Princess Charlotte of Wales, only daughter of the Prince Regent afterwards King George the Fourth, and heiress presumptive to the Throne. He was the grandfather of the present King of the Belgians. It was the Royal influence which was instrumental in securing for the house the grant of a licence by the Magistrates at Surrey Quarter Sessions on the 16th October, 1816.

Financial difficulties were not slow in presenting themselves, and the promoters found their own funds inadequate, and proposed to raise money by public subscription. The following prospectus was accordingly circulated:—

"Proposals for the Royal Coburg Theatre. Mr. Jones,* late proprietor of the Royal Circus, having agreed for a piece of land near the foot of Waterloo Bridge, on the Surrey side, for the purpose of building a Theatre, and having obtained the patronage of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales, and His Serene Highness the Prince of Saxe-Coburg, proposes to dispose of a part by way of subscription, as follows:—The whole is estimated at 12,000*l.*

"A subscriber of one-eighth of that sum to be considered a joint proprietor.

"Subscribers for one share of 100*l.* to receive interest at 5*l.* per cent., and each share to entitle the holder to a personal free admission, transferable each season. The holder of five shares to be eligible to be elected a trustee; and the holder of two shares to be entitled to vote on all occasions.

"Each subscriber to pay down 25*l.* per cent. at the time of subscribing, and 25*l.* per cent. monthly, until

*An engraving of "Mr. Jones, Founder of the Coburg Theatre," is now at the Vic.

the whole is paid. As soon as 4,000*l.* shall have been subscribed, a general meeting of the subscribers to be called for the purpose of framing laws for the government of the concern, and electing trustees, treasurers, and other officers.

"Materials to the amount of several thousand pounds are already purchased; the whole property in scenery, dresses, etc., etc., at the Surrey Theatre has been moved to this concern; and the theatre is intended to open at Christmas next."

From one source or another sufficient money was presently forthcoming to enable a start to be made with the building of the new house. The architect was Rudolph Cabanel, a native of Aix-la-Chapelle, who had settled in London, and who is best remembered nowadays as the inventor of the Cabanel roof. He designed also the stage of the old Drury Lane Theatre, and the Surrey Theatre. The laying of the first stone four months after the Royal patron's wedding, was made the occasion of some public ceremony, and on its exterior surface was cut the following inscription: "This first stone of the Royal Coburg Theatre was laid Sept. 14, 1816, by His Serene Highness the Prince of Saxe Coburg and Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales, by Their Serene and Royal Highnesses' proxy, Alderman Goodbehere." Cabanel used very extensively in the foundations of the Theatre the stones of the old Savoy Palace in the Strand, part of which was cleared away to form Lancaster Place; the site in Lambeth proving extremely swampy. Shortage of cash again presented difficulties, and work had to be stopped until a wealthy Soho merchant, Glossop by name, came forward with a few hundred pounds, which he appears to have put in on behalf of Joseph Glossop, his son. That unfortunately did not go very far, and on the Thursday before Easter, 1817, the workmen went out on strike (probably they were not being paid), and the owner of the considerable amount of scaffolding which was being used in connection with the construction took it all down and away. In this very critical situation Glossop again came to the rescue, the Waterloo-bridge Company also gave assistance (because the theatre would mean more traffic across the bridge, and more traffic would mean more tolls—the bridge was not toll free until 1878, after its

purchase by the Metropolitan Board of Works—) and at last the work was finished.

The theatre was opened on Saturday night, the 9th May, 1818. "The Gentleman's Magazine" noted that the drop scene was a view of Claremont (which had been purchased for the Princess Charlotte and the Prince of Saxe-Coburg); that the boxes, as well as the whole interior, were painted a fawn colour, ornamented with gold wreaths of flowers, and that in the centre of each box was an allegorical painting. The fawn and gold remain to this day, but not the allegorical paintings. "The pit and gallery," it added, "are so constructed that every part of the stage (which is very spacious) may be viewed from them." The proscenium was embellished with a female figure holding a tablet on which was a view of the exterior of the theatre, and this lady was comically identified by a rather later writer as the Melo-Dramatic Muse. The figure has since been removed. In its place are now the Royal Arms, surmounted by the Crown upon a crimson cushion, behind which are represented the Royal Standard, the Union Jack, the Stars and Stripes, and another flag at present unidentified. Other newspapers too made laudatory references to the design and appearance of the theatre, and pointed out that the way to it was direct enough; "but," observed "The Times," "as the Waterloo-bridge Company have taken an interest in completing this theatre, they should also take care that the road from their bridge be well lighted; and, still more, that the footpath, for a part of the way, be better fenced against the accidents of persons in the dark falling into the marshes."* The management took the hint, and in addition to having the approaches to the theatre well lighted, it maintained at its own expense, for the safety of its patrons, additional patrols upon the bridge road. Two engravings, depicting respectively the exterior and the interior of the new theatre, were published by R. Wilkinson on the 1st January, 1819. The performance of the 9th May was of the nature of a dress-rehearsal to which the proprietors invited "the Nobility and Gentry," adding the assurance: "Peace-officers will be in attendance"; and the first public performance was on the 11th, Whit-Monday. The

*Lambeth Marsh had been notorious, at least since the early seventeeth century, as the resort of thieves.

following advertisement comes from a newspaper file of that date:

ROYAL COBURG THEATRE.

Under the immediate Patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg.

The above elegant Theatre WILL OPEN THIS EVENING, May 11, with an appropriate Address by Mr. Munro. After which, a new melo-dramatic spectacle, called TRIAL BY BATTLE; or, Heaven defend the Right. After which, a grand Asiatic ballet, called ALZORA and NERINE; or, the Fairy Gift. To conclude with a new and splendid harlequinade, called MIDNIGHT REVELRY; or, Harlequin and Comus. Lower Boxes, 4s. Upper Boxes, 3s. Pit, 2s. Gallery, 1s. Doors to be opened at half-past 5, to begin at half-past 6. Half-price at half-past 8. Places to be taken of Mr. Grub, at the box-office, from 10 till 4.

Some technical particulars of the Coburg are contained in Thomas Allen's "History of Surrey" (1829). "The stage," he wrote, "which is extensive and better fitted up than any minor house in England, is in depth, from the lights to the wall, 94 feet, and in width, from stage door to stage door, 32 feet. It gradually descends from the wall to the pit. The house holds three hundred and twenty-five pounds." It is instructive to compare these dimensions, assuming them to be correct, with those of some of the largest London theatrical stages of the present day. The relative areas are approximately as follows: Drury Lane, 6,400 square feet; Lyceum, 3,772 square feet; His Majesty's 3,150 square feet; Coburg, 3,008 square feet.

It will be interesting now to see what was the state of theatrical affairs in the town when the new theatre opened its doors, twelve months before the birth of Queen Victoria. The incomparable Mrs. Siddons had retired from the stage and made but the rarest of occasional appearances at benefit performances or for charity. John Philip Kemble, her brother, had retired the summer before, and

had left Edmund Kean, a man of only thirty, undisputed master of the stage. His earnings at this time are said to have averaged £10,000 a year. Macready was playing leading parts at Covent Garden at a salary of from sixteen to eighteen pounds a week for a five years' engagement. Robert William Elliston, the actor who lives for ever in the pages of Charles Lamb, was lessee and manager of Drury Lane. He is buried, by the way, in a vault in St. John's Church in the Waterloo-road. The population of the area which we now call Greater London was not above one-fifth of what it is to-day, and there were only about half-a-dozen theatres of any repute. Such expressions as "a night at the play," or "an evening's amusement," had then a literal application, for people passed four hours or more in the theatre; or if they were unable to do that, they went in at half prices after part of the entertainment had been given. Almost everywhere the triple bill flourished; at the least there were two separate plays with a singer, or a dancer, or some other "turn" between them. Melodrama, spectacle, and harlequinade was a frequent combination at the minor houses, and even at the principal theatres the managements put before their patrons a diversity of attractions for which playgoers have neither time nor inclination now, when few London theatres ring up before 8.15 and the show is over before 11.

But is is necessary to consider the whole theatrical system which then prevailed in London. In the latter half of the seventeenth century that Sovereign who has so often been presented upon the stage, and almost always in a sort of blaze of virtuous glory of which he was the sun—the so-called Merry Monarch—was mildly desirous of providing two of his satellites with the means of livelihood, and that, at no expense to himself. So it was ordained that there should be but two theatres in London, that they should be protected by patents, and that they should have liberty to present all entertainments of the stage whatsoever. That was the origin of the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane and of the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden, and of the many exclusive and arbitrary privileges with which they were surrounded. "Here alone, according to law," wrote F. G. Tomlins, of the patent houses in 1840, when London had sixteen theatres and a population of little less than two millions,

"can the immortal works of Shakespeare, Jonson, Massinger, Fletcher, Beaumont, Ford, and a long line of illustrious poets and wits who have shed a continuous lustre on English literature from Elizabeth's to Anne's reign, find a living voice and being."

It was an astonishing situation, and in course of time a number of other theatres were opened which lacked a patent, and had no legal or official standing, and were called minor theatres by way of distinction from the two patent theatres. In the middle of the eighteenth century the law took tardy cognizance of their existence, and in the twenty-fifth year of the reign of King George II. Sir Robert Walpole fathered a most important measure commonly known as the Licensers' Act. It made two principal provisions. In the first place it limited the King's power and the Lord Chamberlain's power to grant patents or licences, to the City of Westminster or such place as the King should personally reside in; and in the second place, it enabled the minor theatres to perform any other entertainments of the stage but the regular (or "legitimate") drama, no plays being allowed to be presented without a licence from the magistrates, and magistrates being authorized to grant licences to theatres only for music and dancing and other like entertainments of the stage.

In the early nineteenth century—and the same is true of our own time—the two patent theatres concerned themselves little with the classical English drama. Some of the minor theatres, on the other hand—and the Coburg was one of them—did want to have something to do with Shakespeare; and in order to make some show of keeping within the law, songs, dances, and other diversions were introduced into the versions of the plays employed, and the whole thing was presented as an entertainment of a kind which the minor theatres were within their rights in presenting. But the legal aspect was further complicated by other Acts of Parliament of various dates, and in 1819 the position of the newly-opened Coburg was that it was a minor theatre with rights and responsibilities and immunities dependent upon the interpretation of Statute law over which professional opinion was divided, and threatened by prosecution at the instance of the patent theatres should these last choose to consider their monopoly in theatrical

trading invaded by anything which the new house might do.

There are many contemporary references to the Coburg's "splendid glass curtain" and to its "grand marine saloon." The latter was designed and painted by Serres. On one side Neptune was represented "in a superb car, drawn by sea-horses, guided by water-gods, and attended by boys on dolphins." The opposite side displayed the bombardment of Algiers in August, 1816, together with portraits of the Prince of Saxe-Coburg and the Princess Charlotte. The looking-glass curtain was 36 feet in height and 32 feet in breadth, and consisted of sixty-three plates of looking-glass set in a massive gilt-carved frame. When not in use it was hauled up into the roof, but its weight, which was five tons, proved a danger to that part of the structure, and it was removed.

On the 1st June there was staged "for the first time, a Local Sketch, called Epsom Downs; or, All Alive at the Races. The last scene will represent the Race Course, in which real Ponies will start for a Sweepstakes, to be decided in three heats, four times round the stage to form a heat." In this way did the management endeavour to compete with the equestrian delights of Astley's Royal Amphitheatre at Westminster Bridge.

CHAPTER II.

"Patent" versus "Minor."

THE unfortunate Thomas Dibdin, son of the Charles Dibdin who wrote "Tom Bowling" and so many other songs and dramatic pieces of all sorts, was the new lessee of the Surrey. Temple West had pursued him with his importunities; behind the scenes at Drury Lane, in the green-room, in the manager's room, wherever he went, West was there also, to tell him how the new bridge was in a very forward state, and "that the treasures of El Dorado were brass tokens when compared to the wealth that awaited" him in the county of Surrey. Dibdin at last agreed and took the Surrey at a rental of a thousand pounds a year, in addition to which West was to have a third of the profits and no share in the risk of obtaining them.

Between the Coburg and the Surrey there was a rivalry of the most active kind. Dibdin complained that the Coburg strained every nerve not merely to compete with the Surrey in fair opposition, but to anticipate his intended productions and to engage his performers. Constant ill-feeling between the two theatres existed, and Dibdin's dramatisations of classic novels were at once imitated by the Coburg. The opening of that house, so Dibdin says, "was a lamentable circumstance to both parties: it was the ruin of my incipient good prospects, at an expense to itself of still greater magnitude: I lost nearly eighteen thousand pounds at the Surrey; and Mr. Glossop, senior, assured me that he was twenty-seven thousand pounds *minus* by the Coburg." There exists to this day a well-known custom in theatrical circles of giving orders for the play to shop-keepers, publicans, and others who display window-bills. This is said to have been invented in the eighteenth century by one of

the managers of the Surrey, but, be that as it may, the practice was being carried to a ridiculous pitch at the Coburg not very long after its opening. Dibdin says in his autobiography that the Coburg "sent out six hundred large bills weekly to shops, etc., for which each shop received three double orders, i.e., admitting two persons each per week; making in the total thirty-six hundred people admitted gratis weekly, in addition to proprietors' personal friends, performers' orders, individuals' freedoms, etc., etc. I knew not what cards I was playing my game with, nor did I follow this example; therefore it was not to be wondered at that few would pay at my house, when so many could repeatedly amuse themselves without a shilling's expense, at another."

The performances began at half-past six o'clock. "For the Accomodation of numerous Visitors from Greenwich, Deptford, etc.," the management announced "a Coach calls at the Theatre a Quarter before Eleven, At which time the Performances terminate." Throughout these early days spectacular entertainments, in many scenes, and with large numbers of persons engaged upon the stage, enjoyed great popularity, and the Coburg mounted a number of such pieces with an elaboration which shews, at least, that the management was making a very bold bid for public favour. One of the earliest of them, and a good example of its kind, was produced in June, 1818. It was called "The North Pole," and was avowedly founded on the Arctic expedition which was so much in Londoners' minds at the moment. It boasted one very special and particular scene in which playgoers were thrilled by a sight of "A Ship of immense size! Fully rigged and manned, with a Crew of Sixty Persons, effecting her Passage through Floating Islands of Ice, which on separating will shew an expanse of Ocean covering the whole Stage, far surpassing any Scene of Magnitude ever yet produced." The Duke and Duchess of Kent saw it in July.

Before long the Coburg was successfully attacked by Drury Lane. Junius Brutus Booth, an actor who had certain resemblances of style, as well as physical likenesses, to Kean, gave a few performances at the Coburg in December, 1819, and January, 1820, in a version of "King Richard the Third" and other plays. Both

Drury Lane and Covent Garden had liens upon his services at that time, and John Prescott Ward, the secretary of the Drury Lane Committee, filed an information against Glossop under the 10th Geo. II. c. 28, which enacted that if "any person, without authority by virtue of letters-patent from His Majesty, his Heirs, Successors, or Predecessors, or without license from the Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household for the time being, shall act, represent, or perform, or cause to be acted, represented, or performed, for hire, gain, or reward, any interlude, tragedy, comedy, opera, play, farce, or other entertainment of the stage, or any part or parts therein, every such person shall, for every such offence, forfeit the sum of 50*l.*" Glossop was convicted and fined, half the penalty going to the informer, and half to the poor of the parish of S. Mary, Lambeth, in which the theatre was situated. Booth's parts, besides Richard III., were Lucius Junius Brutus in "The Judgment of Brutus"; Horatius in "Horatii and Curiatii" (described as a new grand classical melodrama "produced with unprecedented Splendor, aided by the combined Exertions of every Individual in the Company and a numerous Train of Eighty Auxiliaries"); and, for his benefit, Jerry Sneak, with comic song, in the burletta "The Mayor of Garratt." On this last occasion the playbill contained the following remarkable

"☞ *APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC!!!*

"The Proprietors gratefully embrace the present Opportunity of thanking the Public for the very liberal Support they have experienced during the Engagement of this Gentleman; at the same time they feel it their Duty to state to them, as their Patrons and Protectors, and Guardians of the Best Interests of the Drama, the Persecution to which that Engagement entered into from an earnest Desire to furnish every Gratification they could in return for the constant Encouragement extended to them from the First Opening of the COBURG has exposed them. The Proprietors of the Two Patent Theatres taking Offence at the Attraction of this Gentleman, have thought proper to institute a PROSECUTION, by the way of INFORMATION, against the COBURG THEATRE for the *alledged offence of rationalizing their Performances*, and bringing them within that pale of Perfection

which they would claim exclusively to themselves—how justly the Public will decide—at all events, assured of their continued *Support and Patronage*, the Proprietors of the COBURG THEATRE will take every means in their Power to resist this attempt at abridging their sources of Amusement, and instituting a Monopoly, which by crushing Emulation, will be fatal to the efforts of Genius and the generous Exertion of every species of Excellence ! ! !"

The case was not finally disposed of until the 27th June, 1821, when the King's Bench, to which Glossop had appealed, confirmed his conviction by the magistrates. Booth was thoroughly dissatisfied with his excursion across the water, and after he had played only three nights at the Coburg went to the Surrey "in great agitation of mind; and, hastily writing his name at the bottom of a sheet of paper" desired Dibdin to give him an engagement on the *carte blanche* so liberally provided, "stating that he had been so ill treated at the Cobourg, that he would not play there again."

During Lent, 1820, on Friday nights, sacred music was given, including excerpts from "The Creation," "The Messiah," and other oratorios, and the principal vocalist was Signora Corri (whether Frances or Rosalie does not appear), a member of the accomplished musical family of that name. Mr. M. Corri produced two or three of the plays at about this time, and devoted attention to the music and pantomime arrangements of other plays. In September the following notice was circulated on the play-bills: "To the Watermen of Blackfriars and Waterloo Bridges. The Proprietors have great Pleasure in announcing to them, that as a Reward for their past, as well as future Attention to the Public, *SIR THOMAS WILLSON, BART., Early in the Month of the ensuing October will give* A PRIZE WHERRY! The Particulars of the Arrangement will be duly announced, the Winner to receive the Boat on the Stage of the Royal Coburg Theatre. *A Local Sketch will be introduced for the Occasion.*" The sporting Baronet was the seventh holder of the title, Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson, as the name is more properly spelled, of Charlton in the county of Kent; he was the owner of a private menagerie of wild animals, some of which were allowed to run loose about his house at Charlton.

Drury Lane continued to keep an eye on Waterloo road, and in 1821, when the proceedings arising out of Booth's performance were not finally disposed of, the patent theatre again attacked the minor, alleging that "Thérèse, or, The Maid of Geneva," an English version of a French play, which the Coburg had staged, was an infringement upon "Theresa, or, The Orphan of Geneva," another version of the same work which Elliston had successfully produced at Drury Lane. The affair was several times before the Courts, and there was hard swearing on both sides, but the record so far as it can be traced seems to shew that Elliston abandoned his side of the case, and the dispute ended as a drawn battle in which the Coburg had the advantage. In the course of the proceedings Glossop told the Court that he had expended no less than £30,000 in establishing the Coburg.

The theatre at this time boasted the patronage of some of the best Society and even, on more than one or two isolated occasions, that of Royalty itself. There was a programme "by special desire of the Duke and Duchess of Kent," Queen Victoria's parents, in August, 1819, less than three months after their daughter's birth; another in October, when it was announced that they would "honor the Theatre with their presence, together with several Noble Families," the occasion being the second annual benefit of the Royal Coburg Theatrical Fund; another in September, 1820; and so on. In 1819 a couple of West End box offices "for the Accomodation of the Nobility and Gentry at the West End of the Town" were opened; the one at Fentum's music warehouse, No. 78 Strand, and the other at No. 182 Piccadilly, opposite Burlington House. On at least one occasion, in 1819, Prince Leopold, the theatre's god-parent, himself commanded a performance.

But the most celebrated visitor of them all was Queen Caroline, the ill-used and unhappy Consort of King George the Fourth. She went to the Coburg on Tuesday, the 26th June, 1821. Six months earlier, the King's party had abandoned the proceedings in the House of Lords against her, and though Parliament had not restored her name in the liturgy it had voted her an allowance of fifty thousand pounds a year. A little less than a month later, poor soul, she unsuccessfully

demanded admission to the King's Coronation in Westminster Abbey, and on the night of the 7th August she died. Practically all public opinion took the Queen's side as against the King, and on the morning after this evening at the play "The Times" preceded its account of the visit with a leading article in which the disgraceful proceedings of the trial, "if they will call it trial," were discussed with a manly and independent courage that denounced the whole thing as a foul conspiracy. This is "The Times" report of a historic event:

"It being publicly announced that her Majesty would honour this theatre with her presence yesterday evening, at as early an hour as two o'clock crowds were assembled round the doors; and in less than ten minutes after they were opened, every accessible part of the house was thronged, and thousands, finding access to the theatre impracticable, were content to await her Majesty's arrival without. At 20 minutes past six o'clock the Queen drove up to the theatre in a carriage and four, attended by Lord and Lady Hood and Mr. Ald. Wood. Her Majesty was met at the entrance by Messrs. Serres, Jones and Rorauer, in full dress; who, carrying wax lights, conducted her Majesty through the marine saloon to the royal box, which was elegantly fitted up for the occasion with crimson velvet, bouquets of flowers, etc., and in the ante-room were provided the choicest refreshments. On her Majesty's entrance, she was greeted with shouts of 'God bless your Majesty!' 'The Queen for ever!' which continued, with intermission, throughout the evening; and on her Majesty's departure she was again hailed by the assembled multitude who were waiting outside the doors." The entertainment, by the way, was the inevitable triple bill—"Modern Collegians," a one-act comic sketch; "Marguerite, or, The Deserted Mother," a new musical piece; and "The Carib Chief and the Irish Witch," described as a melodramatic romance — to which was added an acrobatic act by a performer known as Il Diavolo Antonio.

Henry Kemble, nephew of Mrs. Siddons and John Philip Kemble, was a popular actor in the minor theatres from 1819 to his death in 1836. He does not appear to have shared in the qualities which gave other members of the family such professional eminence, for he is said to have possessed "the strongest lungs and weakest

Royal Coburg Theatre,

OPPOSITE WATERLOO-BRIDGE ROAD, LAMBETH.

The Nobility, Gentry & the Public in general are respectfully informed that the above

NEW AND SPLENDID THEATRE,

which has been erected according to the Plans and Designs, and under the superintendance of that celebrated Architect, Mr. CABANEL,

WILL OPEN

ON

WHIT-MONDAY, the 11th MAY, 1818,

UNDER THE IMMEDIATE PATRONAGE OF

His Royal Highness the Prince of Saxe Coburg.

WITH ENTIRELY NEW

ENTERTAINMENTS,

Now preparing on a scale of Magnitude, and great Expence.

The Audience part of the Theatre will be Lighted by

A SUPERB CENTRAL LUSTRE,

With [illegible] and Splendid Illumination with Gas, [illegible] Light over the whole House.

The Decorations of the Interior, and Grand Panoramic

MARINE SALOON,

DESIGNED AND PAINTED BY MR. STEPHENS, (MARINE PAINTER TO HIS MAJESTY).

THE CEILING AND PROSCENIUM,

Designed by Mr. CABANEL, and executed by Mr. LATILLA and Assistants.

THE RICH CHASED GOLD AND SILVER ORNAMENTS BY MR. COLLET AND ASSISTANTS.

THE COMPANY

Already engaged includes many Performers of High Celebrity from the London and principal Provincial Theatres.

THE SCENERY IS ENTIRELY NEW!

And painted by the following eminent Artistes—Messrs. Stevens, Luttrell, Marshall, Stanton, Stapleton, T. Morris, and Assistants.

Machinist, Mr. [illegible]. Wardrobe, Mr. CRADDOCK.

The Whole to be under the direction of Mr. CRAMPTON and the Company of the Music and Theatre to be Conducted by Mr. CHERVAL, from the Royal Circus. Leader of the Band, Mr. [illegible]. Prompter, Mr. [illegible]. Stage Manager and Author of the Entertainments, Mr. NEWMAN, of the Theatre Royal Cheltenham.

The Proprietors, in order to meet the wish and expectation of many Noble Families and Fashionable Parties, have appropriated the Lower Circle to Great Boxes, the accommodation of the Upper Circle has also been considered, and every other attention to those of the most genteel class of the Public is attended to, while the upper rooms of a convenient description have been fitted up for the purpose of Refreshments, as in former years, under the same genteel conditions.

LOWER BOXES, 4s. UPPER BOXES, 3s. PIT, 2s. GALLERY, 1s.

Doors to be open at Half-past Four, to begin at Half-past Five. Half-price at Half-past Eight.

The Performances to commence with Operas and Farces not to be chosen, at the Theatre, Waterloo Road.

☞ NUMEROUS FABRICATIONS IN PUTTING BILLS.

Mons. PATRULEY and respects for the Honour and Favour leading to the Theatre, and particular attention will be paid to LIGHTING the same.

Newman, Printer, Wine Office-court, Fleet-street, and Allen-Street, Goswell-street.

judgment of any performer in his station." For the Coburg he prepared an adaptation of Scott's "Marmion" which was called "The Nun of Saint Hilda's Cave." A good deal of Scott's work was adapted for the stage, and there were produced here versions of "Ivanhoe," "The Lady of the Lake," "Kenilworth" and "Quentin Durward." Other people who had to do with the house were Serres, "director of the scenic department;" and Le Clercq and his wife, who were ballet master and mistress. They had been associated with the house since the very first night, when they were the principal dancers in "Alzora and Nerine," and a good many of their pupils appeared with them. Rorauer was "box-book and house-keeper;" formerly he had been at the Surrey; and he lived at No. 3, Macclesfield-street, Soho Square, then as now, a district noted for a number of charitable institutions. It may have been this circumstance which was responsible in part for the Coburg becoming the centre for several important performances for charity. One of these, on the 12th March, 1822, was in aid of the Westminster General Dispensary in Gerrard-street, under the immediate patronage of King George the Fourth, the Duke of Sussex, the Marquess of Hertford, the Duke of Northumberland, the Earl of Beverley and other distinguished persons. Another, on the 24th June, was for the Royal Universal Dispensary for Children, the patrons being the King, the Duke of York, the Duke of Sussex, Princess Augusta, and the Duchess of Kent.

William Hazlitt visited the Coburg in 1820—he saw Booth as Brutus—and in his paper on the Minor Theatres wrote an unflattering account of it. He found the play indifferent, the acting bad, and the audience low—"Jew-boys, pickpockets, prostitutes and mountebanks"—but it is not easy to reconcile such a description as this with the recorded facts of fashionable company in the boxes.

A number of the Coburg's new plays at this time were written by J. Amherst, who made his first appearance as an actor on the 18th September, 1821. Another author, however, was responsible for the principal feature in that night's bill, which was entitled: "The Cry of Blood; or, The Juror Murderer." This cheerful entertainment was announced as "founded on an awful occurrence which actually took place at the Winchester

Sessions, in the 17th century, Dramatized expressly for the Occasion, by Mr. H. M. Milner." In June, 1822, Barrymore became acting manager as well as stage manager, and presently turned over the duties of the latter post to Le Clercq, who produced some of the plays. In April of the next year Huntley succeeded Barrymore for a few months, and in October Le Clercq seems to have had the entire management of the house. This continued until the Spring of 1824, and on Easter Monday in that year was installed a new manager, Watkins Burroughs, who retained Le Clercq as stage manager and producer. Le Clercq and his wife were still the principal dancers, and Burroughs made a number of additions to the acting company which he himself joined. Le Clercq's management had seen the production of several spectacular melodramas done in what may be called "the grand manner;" among them was "The Caliph Vathek," based by H. M. Milner upon Beckford's celebrated book, "interspersed with Songs Duetts Trios Chorusses Marches Processions Dances Pageants etc." The usual arrangement was that a new show was put up as the first item in the bill, so that it could only be seen at full prices, and was afterwards transferred as its popularity waned to a later position in the evening's entertainment, when it could be seen at half prices.

Another of the interesting people connected with the theatre was Clarkson Stanfield, the marine painter, afterwards a Royal Academician, whom his friend Charles Dickens declared to be "the soul of frankness, generosity, and simplicity, the most loving and most lovable of men." He and David Roberts, another artist of note, were for a while scene-painters at the Coburg, and did a great deal of work for it. Stanfield went from the Coburg to Drury Lane in a similar capacity.

CHAPTER III.

Pantomime; Shakespeare; Melodrama.

JOSEPH Grimaldi, the great clown, appeared at the Coburg in July and August, 1822; first in an entertainment called "Salmagundi," which was a rechauffé of the most popular items in the harlequinades of the preceding fifteen years. He appeared the following week in the pantomime "Harlequin and the Three Wishes," in which he sang "his much admired comic song called 'Tippitywichet.'" A week later still Grimaldi was joined by his son, and they played the two clowns in another pantomime, "Disputes in China." The scenery for this last was by Stanfield, from sketches which he had himself made in China. But before the end of the engagement, Grimaldi became seriously ill, and his other appearances had to be postponed. His last night was the 14th August, when he sang "Hot Codlings." Grimaldi's physical powers were failing, and as his health progressively declined he was often compelled to rest when he should have been at work. After the Coburg engagement he made only a limited number of public appearances, and six years later he retired altogether from the stage and took his farewell benefit at Drury Lane. Seated upon a chair close to the footlights he played one short scene and sang one of the old songs, and wore the motley for the last time; and coming forward later in private dress he spoke his last address to the public. He was only forty-eight. "Like vaulting ambition," he confessed "I have overleaped myself, and pay the penalty in an advanced old age. If I have now any aptitude for tumbling, it is through bodily infirmity, for I am worse on my feet than I used to be on my head. It is four years since I jumped my last jump—filched my last oyster—boiled my last sausage—and set in for retirement. . . For the benevolence that brought you hither, accept, ladies and gentlemen, my warmest and

most grateful thanks, and believe, that of one and all Joseph Grimaldi takes a double leave with a farewell on his lips and a tear in his eyes." Clowns since Joseph Grimaldi's day have always been known to their admirers as "Joey," and clowns wear to this day the dress that was associated with him, and the whitened make-up with the big mouth and the red geometrical figures on the cheeks.

In November, 1822, further improvements were made in the house, and a saloon was opened as a foyer or promenade. This was designed by Cabanel, and was decorated with panoramic views by Stanfield and casts from statues by Canova. In April, 1824, Watkins Burroughs inaugurated his management with the following manifesto:

"EVERY THING NEW.

"This splendid Theatre has been entirely Re-embellished on a most magnificent and costly scale, and rendered, without exception, the most Commodious and Elegant in Europe. In the Audience part of the Theatre, such a complete Change and Renovation has taken place, as to render it an entirely Nouvelle Feature to its constant Visitors; and, it is presumed, that the new costly Embellishments will be found characterized, no less by Taste than by Splendor. In the arrangement of these Extensive Alterations, an attempt has been made to unite the utmost magnificence with the most chaste and classical purity of design. The Cove of the Proscenium is ornamented with beautiful allegorical Paintings, representing Britannia, supported by Thalia and Melpomene invoking the aid of Apollo on this Establishment. The brilliancy and elegance of the new Central Lustre, it is trusted, will be found to defy competition, and the general effect to be at once the most classical, elegant, and unique that has ever been attained by Theatrical Architecture."

It was under Burroughs that there appeared here John Baldwin Buckstone; afterwards known as the popular low comedian, author of some dozens of dramatic pieces of all sorts, and manager of the Haymarket Theatre. He joined the company as a young man of twenty-two in October, 1824, and he was more or less regularly connected with it until 1827.

One of the strangest entertainments ever put upon the stage made its appearance on the 30th August, 1824, described as "a New Grand Historical and Dramatic Memoir", and entitled "George III. The Father of his People." This included no fewer than twenty-six scenes, laid at Windsor as well as in and about S. James' Palace and elsewhere, and the King was shewn delivering a speech from the Throne in the House of Lords, attempting suicide in the Thames, and finally undergoing apotheosis and ascending "amidst the grateful Tears of his admiring People, supported by the Cardinal Virtues, and crowned by Fame with the Immortal Diadem." Another notable scene represented the Royal box in Westminster Abbey at the Handel Commemoration in 1784. "In this Scene" ran the bill "an attempt will be made to convey some Notion of the Sublime and Magical effects produced by the combined efforts of the finest and most extensive Band of Musicians ever assembled under one Roof, as well as to revive the Honors paid by an admiring Nation to the Genius of the Immortal Composer. To effect this object, a numerous train of Auxiliaries have been engaged, an Orchestra will be erected on the Stage consisting of upwards of One Hundred and Twenty Vocal and Instrumental Performers, under the direction of Mr. T. Hughes, with the assemblage of their Majesty's and Suite, the Nobles and Gentry, the Noble directors of the Concert, and a vast concourse of auditors in the area of the Building; it is presumed this Spectacle will afford a Coup D'œil of Scenic Grandeur which for Numbers, Brilliance, and imposing effect, has never been equalled in any Theatre. The Act to conclude with The Coronation Anthem." Still another scene represented a review in Hyde Park, with the King, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York "mounted on Real Chargers," and another, the crimson dining-room of Carlton House "to convey as accurate an idea as possible of the internal splendors of this Princely Mansion." The part of the King was played by Bengough, "whose profile bears some resemblance to that of the late King" said "The Times" next morning. "Whilst we are on the point of resemblance, we may observe that the Queen Charlotte was undoubtedly the best likeness in the piece. Mrs. Weston, who had the honour to represent her Majesty, was dressed after one of Reynolds's portraits of the Queen, and may

pass for a very close imitation of her Majesty. We did not observe that Mrs. Weston took snuff: this is an omission which she will doubtless supply on a future occasion. A Mr. Villiers, who performed the part of Charles James Fox, reminded us strongly of the portraits of that great man when young. The other persons who were put forward to amuse the audience were libels upon the living and the dead. Sheridan was enacted by a slim dandified young man, whom we never should suspect of being a wit; and if the Prince of Wales ever resembled his representative, Mr. Burroughs, it would puzzle us to imagine how he acquired the character of the 'first gentleman of the age.' The Mr. Wilberforce of the Coburg is at least twice as tall as he of the House of Commons."

Some of the newspapers professed themselves mightily indignant at the whole performance, but "The Times" viewed it with good humoured tolerance, and early in September came to the Coburg's defence in a second notice. It admitted that the 'courtiers' coats were rather faded, and suggested that if they had not been, the performance would have escaped attack. It poked fun at Fox's eyebrows—"a most imposing pair of black eyebrows made with a burnt cork." It poked fun at the last scene, in which the poor old King was sent off to Heaven "en cavalier—positively in a cocked hat and jack boots. George III., as all the world knows, was very fond of riding, but we think that the very ingenious person who has invented this piece has carried his notion of the ruling passion strong in death a little too far." And it poked fun at the audience, solemnly recording that a very profound dustman and too chimney-sweepers in the gallery "seemed to enjoy the whole performance with that quiet delight which might be expected from persons of their taste and breeding. The Marquis of Hertford, who sat in a box immediately below them, seemed to receive similar gratification." Lord Hertford may be presumed to have had a professional sort of interest in the piece, for he was Vice-Chamberlain in the Prince Regent's household while his father was Lord Chamberlain. He was the odious creature pilloried by Thackeray in "Vanity Fair" as the "Marquis of Steyne," and by Disraeli in "Coningsby" as "Lord Monmouth." It may have been sheer gratification, or it may have been merely an excess of drink, which was the cause of an

incident at the end of another performance on the 18th September, a Saturday night. Some scoundrel in the gallery threw a quart bottle on to the stage, and the leader of the orchestra had a very narrow escape of being struck. The bottle broke on the stage and flew to pieces, and though Davidge, coming forward, offered a reward of five guineas for the identification of the thrower, it does not appear that he was ever discovered. That was the third affair of the kind at the Coburg that season, and it was reported that a young woman sitting in the pit when a bottle had dropped from the gallery, and hit her on the head, died of her injuries. On some occasions "George III." was followed by an exhibition of nitrous oxide, popularly called laughing gas, by a Dr. Preston from New York, who was said to have administered the gas to as many as ten thousand persons in all the principal cities of the United States. Preston found the subjects for his demonstration in the audience, and box company was conducted through the pass door on to the stage to inhale the gas, and a platform was built from the pit to the stage for the convenience of patrons in other parts of the house.

What sort of a reception was accorded the piece may be gathered from a special bill which was circulated by the management on the 9th September:

> Notwithstanding the invidious and almost universal opposition of the Public Press, to the New Grand Dramatic Memoir of
>
> GEORGE III.
>
> The
>
> *Father of his People!*
>
> The Boxes are Nightly filled by the principal Nobility and Gentry now in Town, and the Pit and Gallery Overflow at an Early Hour—this
>
> *National Spectacle*
>
> Will therefore be Repeated till further Notice, and on Monday, September 13th,
>
> With an Epilogetic Appendix on
>
> Criticophobia
>
> or
>
> *Five Minutes in the Green-Room*
>
> With the Committee of Managers!

On one night a chance of making money was imported into the entertainment, when there was a distribution of numbered tickets in connection with a forthcoming lottery and a glorious prospect of gaining a share in one of four £20,000 prizes.

Burroughs had had some decorative work done to the interior of the house, but his direction of the theatre was not a very long one. In November there was a version of "Arden of Feversham," in which Henry Kemble played Black Will. Melodrama continued the mainstay of the theatre. Davidge played the name part in "Jack Sheppard the Housebreaker; or, London in 1724," which had some London street scenes and a couple of scenes in Newgate, and another on Finchley Common, in which the gallant Paddington Volunteers were introduced. Davidge was also the hero in "Richard Turpin the Highwayman," and the delighted audience revelled in such scenes as the holding-up of a post-chaise, the murder of a gamekeeper, the attack on the York mail (with four real horses to the coach), Turpin shooting his own steed, and finally expiring "amidst the firing of the police."

In 1826 extensive alterations were made in both the exterior and the interior of the theatre, and at Christmas George Bothwell Davidge, who had been one of the renters for the two preceding seasons, became sole lessee. In this year a beautiful engraving in colour of the outside of the theatre, by Daniel Havell, was published by Taylor of High Holborn. We see the house lighted for the play and the audience arriving. Gentlemen's coaches with footmen in cocked hats and plumes holding on behind are setting down company, and in the foreground are a lady and gentleman of fashion enthroned in a dashing pair-horse curricle which the latter is driving. Davidge lived in Charlotte terrace, near the New Cut, and by this time quite a theatrical population resided in and about S. George's Circus, which was known as the Theatrical Barracks. Davidge had been a prominent member of the Coburg company ever since the opening of the house, when he was described as "from the Sans Pareil," afterwards called the Adelphi. His powers as an actor are said to have been limited, but the exclusive "Gentleman's Magazine" said of him after his death that "he excelled in testy and imbecile old men."

The beginning of Davidge's seven-years management was marked by a good deal of spirit. He produced a considerable number of new pieces of all sorts, revived the principal successes of past years, and in general carried on the theatre for some while in a very creditable way. One of the earlier events was the re-engagement of Junius Brutus Booth, who played three nights immediately preceding his departure for America, but on this occasion there was no Shakespeare. As a matter of fact there had been no attempt to give Shakespeare at the Coburg since the successful attack upon the house by Drury Lane after Booth's first engagement in 1819-20; but Davidge was anxious to present Shakespeare there, and he began this part of his work in an extremely ingenious and interesting way. Between September, 1826, and November, 1828, he produced arrangements of seven of the plays, which were not the Shakespeare the patent houses would not let him do, but were at any rate something rather like it. These pieces were "The Lovers of Verona; or, Romeo and Juliet"—announced as a new grand serious drama founded on an ancient and well-known Romance—compiled and arranged by H. M. Milner; "The Taming of a Shrew," with Thomas Cobham as Petruchio; "The Battle of Bosworth Field; or, the Life and Death of Richard III.," a compound of Cibber's "King Richard III." and "Jane Shore," including the murder of the Princes in the Tower, with Cobham as Richard; "The Three Caskets; or, the Jew of Venice"—announced as a new tragic comic melodrama founded on a most popular drama—with Cobham as Shylock; "The Moor of Venice"—announced as a melodramatic piece founded on Shakespeare's admired tragedy—the first of the series in connection with which Shakespeare's name was mentioned on the playbill, with Cobham as Iago; "Florizel and Perdita; or, The Winter's Tale"—announced as a grand serio-romantic drama founded on a popular play of Shakespeare's—with Cobham as Leontes; and "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark." This last was advertised by the management as "not an alteration or adaptation of Shakespeare's admirable tragedy of the same name," and was declared to be "partly founded on the celebrated French tragedy by Ducis;" which was in fact only a French version of Shakespeare's play. Into it were introduced some un-Shakespearian

characters such as Ursula a lady of the court, and Arabella and Julia attendants, and there were some un-Shakespearian incidents and turns in the plot. Cobham played Hamlet.

Peter Borthwick, now principally remembered for his association with "The Morning Post," as a young man dabbled with several professions and made his stage debut at this theatre as "Othello." John L. Toole says in his "Reminiscences," "The result did not encourage him to join our immortal profession," and instead he won notoriety by opposing the proposed abolition of negro slavery and getting into Parliament.

In 1830 there was a piece called "Siamorain-dianaboo, Princess of Siam; or, The Royal Elephant," in which a real female elephant took part. This was a burlesque of a Christmas holiday success at the Adelphi at the same time. In 1831 there was a strong man at the Coburg, Louis Vallî, otherwise known as the Spanish Hercules, who is said to have raised 2,400 pounds weight —considerably more than a ton. Then there was Gouffe, a Frenchman, who was called the man monkey, and gave an acrobatic act, in the course of which, it was announced, he would "traverse the top of the stage, forty feet high, on a single cord with his head downwards —suspend a man by his teeth—hang by his neck," and do a variety of other sensational things. In 1832, in an Indian spectacular melodrama, "Hyder Ali," important parts were played by some performing lions belonging to Martin, another Frenchman, who had already shewn them with the greatest success both in Paris and at Drury Lane. In 1833 there was another foreign act of a different kind; the appearance of some celebrated grotesque dancers, Carelle and Eckner, the former a Frenchman, the latter a German.

On the 9th May, 1831, there was a benefit, "under the patronage and superintendance of a Committee of Gentlemen connected with the Literary, Theatrical, and Sporting World" for Pierce Egan, who himself took part in a rather miscellaneous kind of performance which included, among much else, some boxing. With delicious impudence this was billed as "No opposition at all events to Shakespeare, Pooh! let the sublime dead rest in their graves: the immortal Billy's works would not bring a farden extra nowadays"—this being a palpable

hit at the patent theatres which excused themselves from presenting the stage classics on the ground that "Shakespeare don't pay!" Egan, of course, was the celebrated sporting journalist whose "Boxiana," "Book of Sports," and "Life in London" are still remembered, valued, and consulted. The last of these, which "took both town and country by storm," had as sub-title "The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq., and his elegant friend, Corinthian Tom, accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian, in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis," and dramatic versions of it were produced with great success at quite a number of the theatres including, besides the Coburg, the Royal Amphitheatre (Astley's), the Olympic, the Adelphi, and Sadler's Wells.

Once again Davidge's thoughts returned to the classical drama, and he made an engagement which added a memorable chapter to the history of the house and indeed to that of the whole London theatre. Edmund Kean, the most illustrious among all the stars of the firmament of the patent houses, crossed the water to the "minor" stage of the Coburg.

CHAPTER IV.

Kean and Phelps.

EDMUND Kean played at the Coburg his five most celebrated parts. Davidge is said to have paid him £50 a performance, and he made his first appearance on Monday, the 27th June, 1831, when he played King Richard III. for Davidge's benefit. On the Wednesday he appeared as Othello, and on the Friday as Macbeth. On the following Monday, the 4th July, he played King Lear; on the Wednesday Sir Giles Overreach in "A New Way to Pay Old Debts," and on the Friday Othello was repeated. The six performances were in more ways than one an historic engagement for both the actor and the theatre. Davidge went to the trouble of fitting up a portion of the pit "with Stalls (4s. each) as at the Opera, thus enabling Ladies and Gentlemen to be nearer the great Tragedian than when in the Boxes," and he issued a special announcement in which he asserted "that those of the Theatrical Public who have hitherto only witnessed the efforts of this great Tragedian in the vast spaces of the Patent Theatres, will find their Admiration and Delight at his splendid Powers, tenfold increased by embracing the present Opportunity of seeing them exerted in a Theatre of moderate Dimensions, allowing every Master look and fine Tone of the Artist, to be distinctly seen and heard. These advantages have fully proved, that at no Period of his Career were the fine Talents of this inimitable Actor, displayed in such perfection as they have been during his present Engagement.

"The Proprietor of the COBURG, feels a proud Satisfaction in reflecting that the Preference for the first Appearance of Mr. KEAN on this side of the Water ('the Side on which the olden Theatres once stood,' where Shakspeare, Massinger, and Ben Jonson wrote and acted,) has been given to his Theatre, and he trusts, that the style in which the different Dramas for Mr. KEAN'S

Performances have been produced, have not disgraced the Distinction thus flatteringly bestowed on him."

During this engagement something happened which has never been forgotten, and the recital of which is one of the most curious stories of the London stage ever told. Kean "opened in 'Richard the Third' to an enormous house, and all passed off with great effect" says J. W. Cole in his "Life and Times of Charles Kean." "On the second night he appeared as Othello, on which occasion Iago was personated by Cobham, a prodigious Victoria* favourite." Cobham, by the way, seems to have been quite a fair actor, but he was, like Kean, a rather short dark man, and he set himself up as a rival to Kean. Transpontine audiences thought very highly of him, but the West End had no illusions on the subject of which was the better actor of the two. Serle had been announced on the bills to play Iago, but apparently the cast was altered at the last moment. "The house was crowded as before, but noisy and inattentive. There were nearly twelve hundred persons in a gallery measured for about half the number. The best speeches in the most striking scenes were marred by such unclassical expletives and interruptions as a Cobourg audience were given to dispense, in those days with more freedom than politeness—by the incessant popping of ginger-beer bottles, and by yells of 'Bravo, Cobham!' whenever Kean elicited his most brilliant points. The great tragedian felt disconcerted, and by the time the curtain fell, he overflowed with indignation, a little heightened by copious libations of brandy and water."

"He was then loudly called for, and after a considerable delay came forward, enveloped in his cloak, his face still smirched, not more than half cleansed from the dingy complexion of the Moor, and his eyes emitting flashes as bright and deadly as forked lightning. He planted himself in the centre of the stage, near the footlights, and demanded, with laconic abruptness, 'What do you want?' There was a moment's interval of surprise, when, 'You! you!' was reiterated from many voices. 'Well, then, I am here.' Another short pause, and he proceeded: 'I have acted in every theatre in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, I have acted in all the principal theatres throughout the United States of America, but

*Cole was writing after the Coburg had become the Victoria.

in my life I never acted to such a set of ignorant, unmitigated brutes as I now see before me.'* So saying he folded his mantle majestically, made a slight, contemptuous obeisance, and stalked off, with the dignity of an offended lion. The actors, carpenters, and property men, who listened to this harangue, stood aghast, evidently expecting that the house would be torn down. An awful silence ensued for a moment or two, like the gathering storm before the tempest, when suddenly a thought of deadly retaliation suggested itself, and pent-up vengeance burst out in one simultaneous shout of 'Cobham, Cobham!' Cobham, who was evidently in waiting at the wing, rushed forth at once, bowed reverentially, placed his hand on his heart again and again, and pantomimed emotion and gratitude after the prescribed rules. When the thunders of applause subsided, he delivered himself as follows:—'Ladies and gentlemen, this is unquestionably the proudest moment of my life. I cannot give utterance to my feelings; but to the latest hour of my existence I shall cherish the remembrance of the honour conferred upon me by one of the most distinguished, liberal and enlightened audiences I ever had the pleasure of addressing.' " Extraordinary to add, on the following Monday Cobham played Edgar to Kean's Lear.

Another notable incident in Cobham's career was his appearance in a three-act version—or perversion—of "Hamlet," in which neither Polonius, Ophelia nor Hamlet died, and which concluded with the marriage and coronation of King Hamlet and Queen Ophelia. Cobham played Hamlet, and the play was produced by Milner, whose association with the theatre has been already noted.

Nor was Kean the only one of the great actors of his time to cross the water to Lambeth. Samuel Phelps played there for the benefit of George John Bennett, the tragedian. The play was "Julius Cæsar," Bennett had the name part, Phelps played Cassius, Sheridan Knowles Mark Antony, and Mrs. W. West Portia. John Coleman, the actor, has a vivid account of the performance in his

*Dr. Doran in his famous "Annals of the English Stage" gives the words as: "I have played in every civilised country where English is the language of the people; but I never acted to an audience of such unmitigated brutes as you are."

"Memoirs of Phelps." Knowles, he says, had "a brogue as thick as butter. The oration over the body of Cæsar was delicious. The opening lines he introduced after this fashion:

'Frinds, Romans, Counthrymin, lind me your ears,
'I come to bury Caysar, not to praise 'm' "

Owing to the play having a very long cast, some difficulty was experienced in suiting parts and actors, and Popilius was played by a popular clown who had never been in Shakespeare before and had a very bad attack of stage fright. He caught his foot in his toga as he made his entrance, and fell at full length upon the stage, and when he rose his words fled from him. Advancing to the conspirators, the wretched man could only say to them "I vish yer luck," and at once hurried to the wings; but not before the inevitable wag in the gallery called out: "Never mind Shikespeare, Joey; give us 'Hot Codlins'!"

Phelps made up for Cassius with a dark beard and a bald wig, in which he looked a man of fifty-five; and took his call at the end in private clothes. Knowles came forward, says Coleman, "dressed in a vivid green Newmarket coat, with huge brass buttons and accompaniments in the shape of tightly strapped trousers of Scotch plaid. 'My bhoys,' said the poet—'I mane, ladies and gintlemin—I'm glad to be amongst my owld frinds, the Victorians, onst more. By my honour, y're the finest augience I iver acted to in the whole coorse av me life! God bless you, my childhren!' "

Davidge was no doubt a man of original mind and temper, and about this time he issued an astonishing advertisement in the following terms:

SATAN, IMPERATOR.

To our trusty and well beloved the Most Noble Nicholas Forktail, Duke of Tartarus, Marquis of Styx, Earl Phlegethon, Viscount Cerberus, and Baron Singe'em, Knight of the most Ancient Order of the Gridiron, Grand Superintendent of Cant and Hypocrisy for the City of London, Lord High Chamberlain of our Realm, &c., &c.

WHEREAS, upon information duly given to us by *Anthony Firenails*, No. 8,654,327, of our Metropolitan Police, that *Davidge*, of the *Royal Coburg Theatre*, in our Parish of *Lambeth*, had prepared a *Representation of our Imperial Amusements, in a Drama called* DOMINIQUE THE RESOLUTE;

And Whereas, upon such information we were induced to transport ourself to the said Theatre, and to remain seated *(for sufficient and accustomed warmth)* across the Gas Chandelier, during the Performance of the said Drama called *Dominique.* And Whereas we *found ourself there represented in our true colours, as a most amiable and amusing personage, as we have good cause to know we are, and were altogether much delighted and edified by our own portrait.* And Whereas we hear that *other Theatres are preparing to follow the excellent example of the Royal Coburg, and to play the Devil to the great satisfaction of our numerous friends the play-goers of London:* And Whereas, in the opinion of all charitable and truly well-disposed persons, all Actors have, from time immemorial, been our own peculiar property, THESE ARE TO WILL AND COMMAND YOU, etc., etc.

By his Imperial Majesty,
SNAKEWIG,
Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

Pandemonium, Oct. 1, 1831.

In the same month William Dowton, who had played at the Coburg two years before, returned and played Falstaff in "a melodrama founded on and called King Henry IV." and Absolute in "a burletta called The Rivals," and other parts. He was then in his sixty-eighth year, and for the long period of thirty-six years played at Drury Lane, where he enjoyed the reputation of being a very popular comic actor. Falstaff was considered his best part.

When Davidge first became sole manager, the boxes cost 4s. and 3s., the pit 2s., and the gallery 1s. A little later, the doors opened at six and the play began at seven, and "second price" came into operation at half-past eight. Gradually as competition grew more severe, it became apparent that to lower prices would be a wise step, and this Davidge resolved to do, and at the same time he issued a manifesto in which he discussed in some detail the enormous proportions to which the practice of giving "orders" had grown. "The practice of issuing Free Orders to fill a House to an exclusive Number of Persons, has for a long time existed" he said "in almost every Theatre; a Practice that, while it has not been of the slightest Benefit to the Public, has been a most serious Injury to the Manager! It is an undisputed

ROYAL
THEATRE
as first opened
COBOURG
SURRY.
1 May 1818

Fact, that at the Patent Houses, as the Free and Privilege Lists are now constituted, upwards of 800 Persons are entitled to obtain Admission gratis, before the Proprietors can touch one single Shilling: they are therefore obliged to exact a high Price of Admission from those who do pay, to remunerate them for providing an Entertainment for those who do not. . . .

"It is upon this Principle of Reduction creating Multiplication, that Mr. Davidge intends to act:—instead of filling his Boxes with Persons who pay nothing, he will afford to everyone an Opportunity of witnessing a superior Entertainment, at a moderate and available price. The Supporters of the Theatres are not those they used to be—the late Hours introduced into Fashionable Life prevent the Aristocracy being the Patrons of the Drama: that Honor has merged into the more intelligent though perhaps less affluent Class, England's staple Children, wrongly termed the Middle Class . . . .

"It may be remarked, in addition to the Arguments above adduced for the Reduction of Prices at the Coburg Theatre, that though more compactly built than almost any other Minor Theatre, it will decidedly hold more than other Theatres, excepting the Patent Theatres. The Gallery affording comfortable Accomodations to 1,800 Persons, the Boxes holding 1,200 Visitors, with Ease; and the Pit Nightly containing 1,100 Occupants."

Under the new arrangement, there were procurable box orders, on which 1s. 6d. per head was paid at the doors, and pit orders on which 1s. per head was paid at the doors, and it was announced that "District Box Offices have been appointed at Mr. White's, Sweeting's Rents, Royal Exchange—Mr. Morgan's, 20, Temple-street, Whitefriars—Mr. Kilpack's Cigar Divan, 42, King-street, Covent Garden—Mr. Turner's, 2, Bridge-court, Westminster — Mr. Sutton's, Vinegar-yard, Brydges-street, Covent Garden—and Mr. H. Evans' (Pastry Cook), Kennington Lane." It is clear from this that the Coburg still counted on a substantial degree of support from the City and the West End. A further alteration was made in 1832, when the boxes were 3s., the pit 1s. 6d. and the gallery 1s., and the "Orders" controversy was then renewed with the greatest acerbity between Davidge and his professional rivals. A bill of the Surrey Theatre mentioned the Coburg by name as having, by

the conduct of its management, tended to depreciate the Dramatic Art, and Davidge inquired on the 17th September as a rejoinder, whether the Surrey boxes had not lately been filled with orders for which those who made use of them paid nothing at all, and whether "by a process of hocus-pocus" admissions for six persons had not constantly been issued at the Surrey at the price of half-a-crown. The Surrey management published denials, but Davidge returned to the fray. "On the delivery of the Surrey Play-bills to the Shopkeepers who expose them," he said, "a demand is made of 2s. 6d. per Quarter; a demand unheard of in the history of dramatic affairs; as it is usual for all Minor Theatres to present an occasional Free Order to such Shopkeepers, to induce them to incur the trouble of taking in and exhibiting the Bills. And how is this demand rendered palatable? Why, as before observed, by the presentation of Three Orders for Two Persons each, Quarterly, being for the Admission of each Person, 5d. Now let anyone who knows what buying and selling is, determine whether or not this is selling the Orders.

"This Gentleman states, that 'no Man breathing MORE THAN himself,' (Mr. Davidge) 'has done A TYTHE SO MUCH injury, or so debased and degraded THE CAUSE of the Drama.' The explicit and elegant Phraseology of this need scarcely be remarked, as the Author has renounced all pretensions to a knowledge of the English tongue. But to the fact; it is notorious that no man has more strenuously struggled to maintain and elevate the Drama (not the 'CAUSE' of it) at Minor Theatres than the Proprietor of the Coburg; witness the Penalties he has incurred at the suit of the Patent Theatres.

"After which it may perhaps he permitted to enquire what are the pretensions on this score, of the Proprietor of the Surrey, which entitle him to denounce the efforts of others." In the Spring of 1833, however, Davidge had to drop his prices once again to 2s. for box seats, 1s. for the pit, and 6d. for the gallery.

Davidge's financial adventures at this theatre and elsewhere were numerous. The order system which he introduced was extremely successful at first, and is said to have brought him a clear profit of £6,000. In the days of his prosperity he bought the City Theatre, which

he afterwards let at ten pounds a week, and he bought an annuity of £200 a year which he settled on his wife. Later, however, the tide turned, and he made a very bad speculation in theatrical management at Liverpool, and he was arrested at the instance of Randle Jackson, one of the proprietors of the Coburg, and passed through the Bankruptcy Court. The matter came before Commissioner Williams in the Court of Commissioners on the 24th January, 1834, when Davidge appeared for his final examination. He was then described as "late the proprietor of the Coburg, now Victoria, Theatre," and the claims included one for £47 on the part of the Overseers of the parish of Lambeth, on account of poor rates; a sum which Davidge said was payable, under the terms of his contract with the then proprietors of the theatre, by them. It was said that Davidge "was exerting himself to the utmost for the benefit of his creditors," and the Commissioner is reported to have "passed a high eulogium on the conduct of the bankrupt, who, he observed, had done all that an honest man, in his distressed circumstances, could have done, or that could possibly be expected of him."

After his connection with the Coburg was at an end, in 1834, Davidge became lessee of the Surrey, and made a profit of £4,000 in a single season. He died on the 31st January, 1842, at Davidge's-terrace, Walcot Place, Lambeth, where his residence was, at the early age of forty-nine, and a large number of members of the theatrical profession attended his funeral in the South London Cemetery at Norwood. His private carriage was in the procession, as was that of Osbaldiston, at that time lessee of the Victoria, as it was then called. He left £27,000, and his will had almost the importance of a public document, for after providing for his relatives, he left a fortnight's money to everybody engaged at the Surrey, both company and staff, in whatever capacity; made generous bequests to some of them in addition; and bequeathed also £50 to each of the two theatrical funds, £50 to each hospital in London, and £10 to each London police office poor-box.

An interesting performance of which some particulars survive was for the benefit of the Spanish refugees in England in May, 1832, at the time of the Carlist disturbances in their own country. The bill

included "La Viuda de Padilla," Martinez de la Rosa's five-act tragedy, which was very popular in Spain at that time, in the title part of which Mme. St. Leon Cortes of the Théâtre francais appeared; and some other Spanish pieces.

"Extreme *sang froid*" we read in "The Literary Gazette" "was the pervading characteristic of the Spanish performance. A child that should have been discovered sleeping on a bank, walked on, adjusted itself, and then rolled about *ad lib.*, till a don entered with the utmost coolness, and pomelled, nay almost kneaded, the naughty child into the desired position. The heroine having duly died outside the curtain, curled herself up, on its descent, like a touched caterpillar, and then quietly walked off the stage. A gentleman then came on to deliver a recitation, which he ended by stabbing himself and dying, as per example, out of bounds. On seeing the descending baize, he scampered up and rushed off with a terror truly ludicrous. His consternation, however, was nought to that of the whole corps, when, having first quietly suffered a large flag to hang against the gas-lights at the wing till it was in flames, they gave themselves up to the very extravagance of fear, and gesticulated with a despair that was particularly amusing to a Coburg audience."

But in spite of occasional performances that demanded respect and attention, the Coburg got a bad name and descended to the depths of the least of the Minor Theatres. The audiences often were so noisy that it was impossible to take the play seriously. The acting was careless. On the first night of "The Dreadful Secret," one actor about to impart it to another, enjoined him: "Come this way, for it must be uttered where no ear can see, or eye can listen to us." Another actor in another play cried one night: "Fly! shave yourself from the same which awaits you" in a manner now traditionally worthy of Dr. Spooner himself. In "Richard the Third" Stanley hailed Richmond: "Long live Henry the Second, King of England!" instead of Henry the Seventh. The stage management was equally slovenly. A writer in 1832 asked whether Shakespeare intended Richard in his dream to be haunted by the frightful forms of carpenters and scene-shifters; "if not, let the Coburg stage-manager look to it." "I never visit this theatre,"

he wrote "without seeing the same cloak on the shoulders of one or other of the actors: it is the more remarkable garment, from the circumstance of its being a most undeniable table-cover with a collar sewed to it." The act drop often fell with members of the company between it and the footlights. One night an actor spoke the line in a piece, "Now then we are all safe," and at that moment tripped over a ladder on the stage and fell down, and burned his nose on a torch he was holding. In "The Antiquary," in the scene wherein the lady is saved from the waters by being pulled up in a chair lowered from the cliff above, the scene-shifter, or perhaps the scene-designer, had forgotten the cliff: the chair was lowered from the sky, and Miss Pearson hoisted up out of sight into heaven. On another first night a trap-door stuck, and "though the victim fairly flung himself upon it, the powers below could not succeed in dragging him more than an inch and a half down to perdition."

CHAPTER V.

Sheridan Knowles, Macready and Paganini.

IN the Summer of 1833 the Royal Coburg Theatre passed into fresh hands as the Royal Victoria Theatre. A number of considerations made the change of name desirable. In the first place the "Coburg," excellent as that appellation had originally been, had by this time lost its meaning, for the English wife of the Prince of Saxe-Coburg was dead, and the Prince himself had withdrawn from this country and had made his State entry into Brussels as King Leopold the First of the Belgians. Victoria was heir to the Throne, and the use of her name as a designation in succession to that of her uncle had therefore much to recommend it. The new managers were William Abbott and Daniel Egerton, two actors who were both members of the Covent Garden company. They had a seven years' lease. Of the former, Hazlitt declared "Mr. Abbott never acts ill," but Leigh Hunt took a contrary view of his abilities: "Mr. Abbott has taken it in his head that noise is tragedy, and a tremendous noise he accordingly makes. It is Stentor with a trumpet." This was of his Romeo in 1830. "We hear he is a pleasant person everywhere but on the stage, and such a man may be reasonably at a disadvantage with his neighbours somewhere." Genest pokes fun at him in "Some Account of the English Stage" as "another theatrical *Esquire*." He and Egerton re-painted and re-decorated the interior of the house, built a new stage, and engaged a competent company, and so it was that a fresh start under a new name was made.

Abbott and Egerton vigorously took up the task of creating for the Victoria the good reputation which the Coburg had lost. At the outset of their management they did two notable things; they secured the co-operation of Sheridan Knowles, and they devoted considerable

attention to the classical drama. Three of Knowles' plays they staged before the year was out, and in each of them the author appeared, playing Master Walter in "The Hunchback," the name part in "William Tell," and St. Pierre in "The Wife." On the 25th October, 1833, the management issued an address thanking the public for its support, and recalling that near that spot Shakespeare wrote and acted, Ben Jonson triumphed, and Beaumont and Fletcher were in friendly and everlasting union. "They restore to it now an actor-author, whose humbler name yet 'offers no violence to things so majestical,' whose genius is admitted to belong to the order of the same great family, in whose world he has lived, whose convictions he has undergone."

Shakespeare proved successful, and Abbott and Egerton announced the plays they put up as Shakespeare's tragedy, or Shakespeare's comedy, as the case might be. They began with "King Richard III.," on the 16th September, and this was such a draw with Warde as Richard that it was repeated a good many times. Ten days later "Othello" was given with Warde as the Moor. On the 7th October there was "Hamlet" with Serle as the Prince and Mrs. Keeley as Ophelia; on the 10th October, "The Merchant of Venice" with Serle as Shylock; on the 28th October, "Romeo and Juliet" with Abbott as Romeo and Knowles as Mercutio; and on the 16th December "Macbeth," with Knowles as Macbeth, Abbott as Macduff, Egerton as Banquo, and Mrs. Egerton as Lady Macbeth. Matthew Locke's music—which a modern stage superstition regards as "unlucky"—was used, and there were fourteen or fifteen "vocal witches."

Knowles was playing again at the Victoria in the summer of 1834, and took a farewell benefit there before leaving for the United States. It was on the 28th July, and was of especial interest inasmuch as William Charles Macready took part in it, appearing with the author in Knowles' play "Virginius." Macready had offered to play Icilius, leaving the author the principal part in his own play; but Knowles would not listen to this and chose rather to act Dentatus to Macready's "Virginius." Liston and Mrs. Orger appeared in the farce "Kill or Cure," and the evening concluded with "William Tell," in which Knowles played his old part. The following

account comes from a contemporary source. "Every part of the house was densely crowded, while great numbers who were unable to obtain accomodation in the boxes were allowed to go behind the scenes, and, as in the very olden time, many of them were seen ranged between the side scenes during the performance. At the conclusion of the tragedy, there was a confusion of vociferation in the house, in which calls for Mr. Macready and Mr. Knowles were mingled. As this increased at the commencement of the interlude, and was aggravated by the outcry raised against people, non-professional, obtruding themselves on the stage, Mr. Abbott was compelled to come forward, and, in his usual cogent and persuasive manner, stilled the tumult, by assuring his audience that Mr. Macready was much exhausted after his efforts in the tragedy, but should have the pleasure to appear before them at the end of the then commencing piece."

When this time came, Knowles led Macready forward by the hand, and the two received a great ovation, and after Macready had retired, Knowles thanked the audience for the manner in which they had crowded to his benefit, and those of his brethren who had volunteered to afford him their services. "But in an especial matter did he declare himself beholden to one man amongst them—to Mr. Macready; Mr. Macready, but for whose enthusiastic zeal in favour of the first piece in which he had appeared as a writer before the London public, it was a thousand to one that he (Mr. Knowles) should never have acquired any name as a dramatist. (Cries of 'No, no!' and great applause.) To the management of the Victoria Theatre he also expressed his deep acknowledgments. Much did it deserve for sacrifices made in favour of the true drama, and for having brought together as worthy, as talented a company as ever reflected honour upon any stage. (Much applause.)"

The whole speech, another report tells us, was received with tremendous enthusiasm and the cheering at the end was loud and long; and yet another account speaks of the emotion that was stirred in every part of the densely crowded house by Knowles' sincerity, and the way he took his leave with an expression of hope that he might again in propitious times behold his friends.

Macready had twice previously visited the Victoria as a spectator, and he recorded his impressions in his diary. The first visit was paid on the 15th August, 1833; "Went to the Victoria Theatre—a very pretty salle and well appointed—but Warde's acting was the most elaborate defiance of nature and taste I ever witnessed. At the Victoria Theatre I saw Mr. Keeley and Miss Garrick: why did I not speak to them? it was not pride, but a false shame which is always taken for it, and does the exhibitor equal injury." He went again on the 12th July, 1834, "to see 'Charles I.' The play is wretchedly constructed, with some powerful scenes, many passages of power and considerable effect in the sketch of Cromwell's character, which, deserving first-rate support, was consigned to the murderous hands of Mr. Cathcart—a very poor pretender indeed. There was so little plot in it that I could not remember the order of the scenes. Some German musicians afterwards were very fair, and some Spanish dancers excellent." Precisely a week later Macready received a letter from Knowles with the request that he would act Alfred for his benefit on the 28th of the month. "After breakfast sat down to answer Knowles; I confess, though it is a great inconvenience and I feel it rather a descent to play at the Victoria, yet I am gratified in receiving this application from him. . . . I answered him in the kindest tone, assenting to his wish." It was arranged, as we have seen, that Macready should play Virginius, and on the Saturday he worked for some time at the part. The benefit was on the Monday. "At the Victoria Theatre, saw Broad"—the stage manager—"Knowles, Liston, Abbott, Miss Jarman, etc., applied to by Abbott to engage. On the way there called on Forster" — the friend and biographer of Charles Dickens—"who told me that the idea of the application to me originated with himself—explained to me how very gratefully Knowles expressed himself. My dressing-room was more inconvenient and ill-appointed than many provincial ones, and when I went on the stage I found the wings literally choked up with people. I was rather inclined to be out of temper with this, but soon recollected myself, and acted as well as I could—much of the character, Virginius, very well—really, and with heart. My reception was most enthusiastic—certainly the most of any that

appeared. At the end I was called for, but declined going on and went to undress. In consequnce of the continued clamour Abbott promised that I should appear at the end of the farce. Saw Sarah Garrick, and begged her to remember me to her mother—'Ehen! fugaces, Postume.' Captain Williams, Dance, Price, Forster, Jerdan, Egerton, and Mr. E——came into my room, and generally expressed their feeling of my coming forward on this occasion of Knowles' farewell benefit. Abbott distressed me with importunities, on personal grounds particularly, to engage for a few nights. I good naturedly but firmly resisted, and I was right in doing so —how satisfactory it is to be able to say that to oneself on any occasion! Went on the stage, or was rather pulled on by Knowles—the applause was tumultuous—I bowed and retired."

In September, 1833, C. N. Simpson had a benefit. Simpson was one of the best-known characters of the time, for he was for very many years Master of the Ceremonies at Vauxhall Gardens, and he was, in addition, something of a dramatic author. He wrote a farce, "The Spare Bed," which was extremely popular at the Victoria, and on the 26th September he himself played in it ("his first appearance on any stage"), the part being Captain Ardent, to the Peter Pigeonwiddy of Keeley and the Clarinda of Miss Sydney. This was the second item in a triple bill which began with "Othello" and concluded with another specimen of Simpson's composition, called "Mr. Simpson M.C., or, Vauxhall Gardens," in the course of which was introduced "a New Scene representing the Gigantic Figure of Mr. Simpson, illuminated in variegated lamps, as in Vauxhall Gardens." This conspicuous occasion was made the subject of an address to the public by the beneficiary, in which he informed the world at large from Princes and Princesses downwards, that he C. N. Simpson, for thirty-six years Master of the Ceremonies at Vauxhall, was one of the very few survivors of Admiral Rodney's action in the West Indies on the 12th April, 1782. Afterwards his ship was paid off, and he stated that "he was, like other young gentlemen in his situation, honorably discharged in the thirteenth year of his age. . . . And in consequence of these achievements, he confidently hopes that all the World and his lovely and accomplished Lady will

be present at the Royal Victoria Theatre." The play-bill was decorated with a little portrait of this worthy; a bald-headed personage who with his right hand raises his top hat in elegantly bended fingers, and with his left hand dangles a cane. He wears a big buttonhole of flowers, a starched frill, and a bunch of seals, and on the whole presents an appearance suggestive both of Beau Nash and Mr. Pickwick. Thackeray mentions him in "Vanity Fair" as "the gentle Simpson, that kind smiling idiot, who, I daresay, presided even then over the place"—i.e., at the time when Jos. Sedley drank a bowl of the notorious Vauxhall punch and thereafter called Becky Sharp his "dearest, diddle-diddle-darling." Another account says that his appearance was in keeping with the oddity of his character; "he was a short man, with a large head, plain face, pitted with the small-pox, a thin thatch of hair plastered with pomatum and powder. He was the very climax of obsolete politeness."*

In the same year opera glasses were placed on loan in the theatre, and we hear of the Red Rover Omnibus, which left Gracechurch street every evening at six and passed the theatre on its way to Bridge-street, Westminster, "at the time of the commencement of the play†; and again at a Quarter-past Eight—arriving at the Theatre about the time of Half Price—Fares 6d." A few weeks later the new management established a depot for umbrellas, as it was called, "at the Box and Pit entrances, and Parties can be accomodated by Mr. T. Thompson by leaving a Deposit of Three Shillings for each Umbrella."

The Princess Victoria, then a young lady of fourteen, and her mother the Duchess of Kent, as well as the Duke of Gloucester, and others whom "The Morning Post" briefly described as "a long list of fashionables" visited the house on Thursday, the 28th November, 1833, when an opera, "Guy Mannering; or, the Gipsy's Prophecy," by Daniel Terry, which had been originally produced at Covent Garden on the 12th March, 1816, was followed by a spectacle "Gustavus the Third." Between the pieces the National Anthem "was executed by the whole of the dramatis personæ."

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* The Rev. J. Richardson, "Recollections of the last Half Century," 1856.

† At this time the doors opened at six, and the play began at a quarter to seven and ended at half-past eleven; half price at a quarter to nine.

Never was the house conducted with more enterprise and spirit, or with a greater regard for its dignity as a London theatre, than by Abbott and Egerton. Some idea of the theatre and the work it did at that time may be gathered from a summary of the programmes of the week of the Royal visit. On Monday there was "Romeo and Juliet" followed by "Captain Stevens," in which Mrs. Keeley played Blonde, and "Midas," a musical burletta. On Wednesday the bill was changed to "The Stranger," with Mrs. Keeley as Charlotte, followed by "Captain Stevens" and "Midas." On Thursday, as we have seen, there was "Guy Mannering" and "Gustavus the Third." On Saturday were presented "The Haunted Tower," an opera,, with Mrs. Keeley as Adela, "Of Age Tomorrow" with Mrs. Keeley as Maria, and "Captain Stevens" again. The plays were handsomely mounted; Mrs. Egerton as Queen Elizabeth in Sheridan Knowles' comedy "The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green" entered, as "The Times" says, "on a superbly caparisoned charger" and was "gorgeously dressed." The acting was as good as was to be seen anywhere in London, and on at least one occasion was said to have exhibited "more feeling than we usually see on the boards of even patent theatres." The houses were often crowded and enthusiastic, and disorders were rare. On the first night of Miss Mitford's "Charles the First" a lad in the pit hissed and created such a disturbance that the police were called in. Their arrival added to the confusion until Abbott neatly quelled the uproar by saying: "Ladies and gentlemen, permit me, respectfully, to offer one word. Pray, as the gentleman appears to be so very singular in his opposition, let him freely enjoy that singularity." This play drew all fashionable London across the water; on one night there were present the Duke and Duchess of Leinster, the Marquess and Marchioness of Tavistock, the Earl and Countess of Mulgrave, Viscount and Viscountess Molyneux and quite a number of other persons of title, whose names the newspapers were not slow to chronicle. Another great attraction was a panorama of the fire which destroyed the old Houses of Parliament, and there was added to the equipment of the theatre a second looking-glass curtain which was so long regarded as one of the sights of London. This was first lowered on the 29th September,

1834, after a performance of "Othello," when Ramo Samee, the Indian juggler, gave his performance in front of its gleaming vastness. One of his tricks was to "swallow" a sword said to be two feet long, and he fulfilled several engagements at this theatre and was a great favourite there. The curtain was a surface of many plates of looking-glass neatly fitted together, and in it was reflected the whole interior of the house, boxes, pit, gallery and all, in a way that made the theatre look like a circle and not the semi-circle it was and is. During the time in which the glass curtain had been under construction, the one big chandelier which had hitherto hung from the centre of the ceiling had been superseded by a large number of small chandeliers lit with gas; and the glare of the reflected lights must have been unpleasantly strong.

There was one other exceptional attraction in 1834; for on the 17th June, an historic night, Nicolo Paganini gave at the Victoria his farewell concert in this country. The great genius of the violin, the wonder of all Europe, was then at the very zenith of his achievement, though not, perhaps at that of his popularity in this country. His fees were regarded as enormous. Vauxhall Gardens offered him £1,000 for three nights, but he refused such terms as those and demanded £5,000 for twelve nights. Much higher prices for admission to hear him were charged than any other musician could command, and there was a little rhyme that ran:

> Who are these who pay five guineas
> To hear this tune of Paganini's?
> ——Echo answers, "Pack o' ninnies."

On this occasion, however, the whole proceeds of the concert were devoted by Paganini to the charitable object of assisting the daughter of a brother musician, Watson of Covent Garden, who had fallen on hard times, and the prices were moderate enough. Paganini afterwards eloped with the lady to the Continent. "In the course of the concert" ran the advertisement: "Signor Paganini will perform—Larghetto Amoroso, followed by the admired variations upon the popular Neapolitan Canzonetta, the Carnival of Venice, descriptive of the freaks and vagaries of a Venetian Carnival. The humorous variations on the Contradanza delle Streghe, or the Dance of the Witches round the Walnut-tree of Benevento. Sonata

(the 2nd time in this country), composed expressly for Napoleon, and as played before the late Emperor at Milan, on one string (the fourth), being the first ever composed for one string only. Variazioni extempore (first time), on two Spanish National Airs, viz.: La Follia and Fandango." Paganini had already appeared at the Victoria, though not *in propria persona*. An actor made up to resemble him took part in a pantomime called "The Harlequin Yorkshireman" which had been put on after "King Richard III." in the previous autumn, and actually played violin fantasias But the great moment came when Clown and Pantaloon attempted to seize "Paganini," and "Paganini" forthwith vanished. The quaint termination of the little scene was no doubt an allusion to the belief, widely held among ignorant people both here and on the Continent, that the Italian virtuoso was in league with the Devil, and that his amazing technical dexterity had the Devil in it. According to another account, and to the playbill, the "Paganini" was a life-size automaton which "fell to pieces."

But Abbott and Egerton failed to command for long the success they deserved. Abbott eventually emigrated to America and died at Baltimore in distressed circumstances, and after a twelve-month at the Victoria Egerton retired from its management a ruined man.

CHAPTER VI.

The Bad Old Days.

AFTER the Abbott and Egerton management ended, the fame and fortunes of "the Vic.," as it was now called, again began to decay. There was an L. Levy, who was described as sole proprietor in 1836-7, and in 1840 F. G. Tomlins gave an account of the theatre in his "Brief View of the English Drama," which may be quoted:

"The Victoria Theatre, has, perhaps suffered more vicissitudes than any other. Its performances have been of every kind, and of every quality. Melodramas of the deepest dye and coarsest texture were once its staple commodity—when Turpin cut his horse's throat upon the stage, and the fact was 'realized' by a quantity of red ochre. Here Kean has performed; as also his imitator, Junius Brutus Booth; and Mr. Sheridan Knowles, in some of his own refined and genuine plays. Vestris's genteel (there is no other term for them) company have exchanged the courtly audience of the Olympic, for the porter-drinking one of this theatre. Here Mr. Serle ('the gentleman of acknowledged talent,' latterly employed as solemn censor to the works of the literati of the day for Covent-garden Theatre) used to combat with Mr. Martin's 'tame wild beasts'—the small Van Amburgh of his day. It has been everything by turns, but nothing long—ever aiming at novelty, but never pursuing any course sufficiently steadily to raise a character or secure a continuous and respectable audience. In its attempt towards performing the legitimate drama, it only pursued the system of having one popular actor in the principal character, and in that it was stopped by the larger 'dogs-in-the-manger,' the patent managers. Situated in one of the worst neighbourhoods, its audiences are of the lowest kind, and if the English Emperor or Empress should visit it, it would be necessary to imitate the Roman potentate, by drenching the audience with rose-

water to neutralize certain vile odours arising from gin and tobacco, and bad ventilation. But even here is 'food for philosophy'; and the universality of the power of dramatic genius, and the natural force of the mind and heart, is demonstrated by the attention and justice with which certainly one of the most uneducated audiences appreciate genuine pathos, and even genuine wit and poetry."

Gustavus Vaughan Brooke, the Irish actor who was afterwards known as "the Hibernian Roscius," and who after a career of more than the ordinary number of ups-and-downs perished by shipwreck, made his first London appearance at this house in 1840, or perhaps a little earlier, as Virginius.

There were few institutions in the London of his time with which Charles Dickens was unfamiliar, and the big theatre in Lambeth was not one of them. When Nicholas Nickleby was presented to two distinguished members of the profession of which Mr. Vincent Crummles was also an ornament:

"Miss Snevellicci's papa (who was scented with rum and water) said that he was delighted to make the acquaintance of a gentleman so highly talented; and furthermore remarked, that there hadn't been such a hit made—no, not since the first appearance of his friend Mr. Glavormelly, at the Coburg.

'You have seen him, sir?' asked Miss Snevellicci's papa.

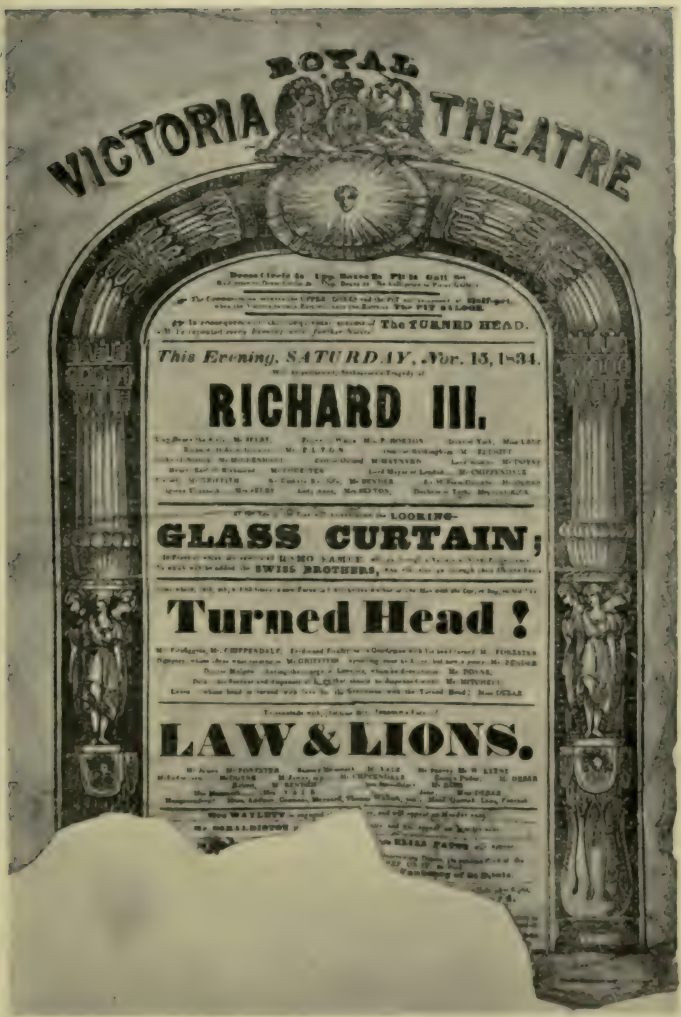
'No, really I never did,' replied Nicholas.

'You never saw my friend Glavormelly, sir!' said Miss Snevellicci's papa. 'Then you have never seen acting yet. If he had lived ——.'

'Oh, he is dead, is he?' interrupted Nicholas.

'He is' said Mr. Snevellicci, 'but he isn't in Westminster Abbey, more's the shame. He was a ——. Well, no matter. He is gone to that bourne from whence no traveller returns. I hope he is appreciated *there*.'

"So saying Miss Snevellicci's papa rubbed the top of his nose with a very yellow silk handkerchief, and gave the company to understand that these recollections overcame him."

But before he wrote "Nicholas Nickleby," in 1838, Dickens had already said a word about the house in a paper entitled "The Streets—Night," which he wrote as

ROYAL
VICTORIA THEATRE
This Evening, SATURDAY, Nov. 15, 1834.
RICHARD III.
GLASS CURTAIN;
Turned Head !
LAW & LIONS.

a young man of twenty-two or twenty-three, and which was afterwards reprinted in "Sketches by Boz." He described the appearance of dirt and discomfort in the streets about the Victoria Theatre, and noted the ragged boys sheltering from the rain under the canvas blind of a cheesemonger's.

"Here they amuse themselves with theatrical converse, arising out of their last half-price visit to the Victoria Gallery, admire the terrific combat, which is nightly encored, and expatiate on the inimitable manner in which Bill Thompson can 'come the double monkey' or go through the mysterious involutions of a sailor's hornpipe."

Two hours later the theatres are empty, but Londoners are far from ready for bed.

"One o'clock! Parties returning from the different theatres foot it through the muddy streets; cabs, hackney-coaches, carriages, and theatre omnibuses, roll swiftly by; watermen with dim dirty lanterns in their hands, and large brass plates upon their breasts, who have been shouting and rushing about for the last two hours, retire to their watering-houses, to solace themselves with the creature comforts of pipes and purl; the half-price pit and box frequenters of the theatres throng to the different houses of refreshment; and chops, kidneys, rabbits, oysters, stout, cigars, and 'goes' innumerable, are served up amidst a noise and confusion of smoking, running, knife-clattering, and waiter-chattering, perfectly indescribable."

In 1841 David Webster Osbaldiston assumed the direction of the theatre. His management of the Victoria was chiefly famous for the production of homely melodrama, and this much he himself claimed and admitted, for he billed a forthcoming Easter-Monday attraction in 1843 as "one of those Beautiful Domestic Dramas for which this Theatre has already, under the present Management, become so universally and extensively celebrated;" while his company be at the same time described as "so peculiarly pre-eminent in the Representation of those Affecting Scenes of Real Life, which come so closely and so touchingly home to the Hearts of all." Some of these beautiful dramas were "Mary White, or, The Murder at the Old Tabard;" "Simon Lee, or, The Murder of the Five Fields Copse;"

"Susan Hopley, or, The Trials and Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl;" "Jane Paul, or The Victim of Unmerited Persecution;" "The Rover's Bride, or, The Murder of the Bittern's Swamp;" "Poor Susan, or, The Fate of the Village Maid;" and so on. In a number of them Miss Vincent played the heroine, and E. F. Saville was the villain. He was the brother of Helen Faucit, subsequently Lady (Theodore) Martin, the great interpreter of the poetic drama many of whose Shakespearian performances have become stage traditions. He was born in 1811 and educated at Christ's Hospital, and served five years' apprenticeship to a surgeon at Reading before entering the theatrical profession. "The Theatrical Times" gave a portrait of him in 1846, and, in witty allusion to his popularity with the Victoria gallery, quoted Dryden's couplet:

> The very *gods* do look
> With wonder on thy work.

John Hollingshead, some time manager of the Gaiety Theatre, has preserved in his autobiography a lively account of a performance at the Victoria. The play was a version of "Oliver Twist," and Bill Sikes was played by Saville.

"The gallery of the Victoria was a huge amphitheatre, probably containing about fifteen hundred perspiring creatures; most of the men in shirt-sleeves, and most of the women bare-headed, with coloured handkerchiefs round their shoulders, called 'bandanna wipes' in the slang of the district, and probably stolen from the pockets of old gentlemen who were given to snuff-taking. This 'chickaleary' audience was always thirsty—and not ashamed. It tied handkerchiefs together—of which it always seemed to have plenty—until they formed a rope, which was used to haul up large stone bottles of beer from the pit, and occasionally hats that had been dropped below. . . .

"It was this body—the unregenerate playgoer—who always has existed, and always will exist, in spite of theatrical reformers—the 'groundlings' of Shakespeare's time, the swinish multitude of ours — who were maliciously tortured by Mr. E. F. Savile and half-a-dozen other representatives of Dickens' criminal animal. The murder of Nancy was the great scene. Nancy was always dragged round the stage by her hair, and after this

effort Sikes always looked up defiantly at the gallery, as he was doubtless told to do in the marked prompt copy. He was always answered by one loud and fearful curse, yelled by the whole mass like a Handel Festival chorus. The curse was answered by Sikes dragging Nancy twice round the stage, and then, like Ajax, defying the lightning. The simultaneous yell then became louder and more blasphemous. Finally when Sikes, working up to a well rehearsed climax, smeared Nancy with red-ochre, and taking her by the hair (a most powerful wig) seemed to dash her brains out on the stage, no explosion of dynamite invented by the modern anarchist, no language ever dreamt of in Bedlam could equal the outburst. A thousand enraged voices, which sounded like ten thousand, with the roar of a dozen escaped menageries, filled the theatre and deafened the audience, and when the smiling ruffian came forward and bowed, their voices in thorough plain English, expressed a fierce determination to tear his sanguinary entrails from his sanguinary body."

James, who was in the bill in 1846, was then seventy-eight years old, and had been in active professional life for sixty years.

Important changes were by this time being made in the character of the immediate neighbourhood of the theatre, by the construction of the South Western Railway terminus under the name of Waterloo station. Osbaldiston seems to have been in financial difficulties, but he could do something better than melodrama when he chose, and he put on quite a number of Shakespeare's plays and took parts in them himself. In "Hamlet" he played the Ghost to Saville's Prince, in "As You Like It" Jacques to Saville's Orlando, in "The Merchant of Venice" Shylock to Saville's Gratiano, in "King Lear" the title rôle to Saville's Edgar. He also produced "King Richard III." His connection with the Victoria came to an end so far as I have been able to trace it, early in 1848. In that year, on the 31st January, he presented for the "First Time, an entirely New Drama (in Four Acts) founded on the celebrated work of the same name, by Currer Bell, Esq., and now engaging the attention of all readers, to be entitled JANE EYRE." In this, Miss Vincent played the name part. Charlotte Bronte's book had been published in August, and in December had

begun the great public demand for copies which called forth the second edition, with the dedication to Thackeray, in the same month as the production of the play. It was not until late in the next year that the secret of the identity of "Currer Bell, Esq." was abandoned. This play is said to have had good scenery and "some really excellent acting."

At the same time, Osbaldiston's reputation as a manager was of the lowest kind, and his management was actually referred to in print as "the most degraded in London." Two incidents connected with it are not without importance. There was at that time a general custom in the profession—it does not now exist—for managers to issue gratis to each member of their companies a card admitting two persons nightly to the boxes. Osbaldiston issued these cards not only to the company but to the staff, including dressers, gas-men and everybody else about the house, and demanded payment for them, which he was in the habit, in some cases at least, of deducting at the rate of so much a week from the salaries or wages. In 1846 a comedian, Thomas Fredericks, received one of these cards and afterwards declined to pay for it, and Osbaldiston sued him in the Southwark Borough Court of Request for £3, which was alleged to be due as the price of it. At the hearing Fredericks said that he had never agreed to pay for the card, and that when he received it, "he considered it as a privilege as a performer. He had been seven or eight years connected with theatricals, and always had that privilege presented him by the managers. There was no theatre in London, where the managers extorted payment for the privilege." Saville gave corroborative evidence as to what the custom of the profession was, but Commissioner Drew gave judgment for the plaintiff with costs, and this remarkable decision was reported in detail, in the public press and was greeted with the greatest astonishment and indignation among the profession, and was furthermore very bluntly criticised by "The Theatrical Times," a most respectable and ably-conducted periodical which was widely read in the profession and had a good deal of influence.

The other incident was of a different kind. The Victoria, like most other theatres, had a saloon, and these theatre saloons were frequented by disreputable

characters of both sexes. In some cases the saloons were sub-let to contractors, and it was known that women of indifferent repute were admitted to them free. In February, 1847, the Lord Chamberlain circularised managers on the subject, but in the preceding month the first steps were taken, and Osbaldiston was convicted and fined twenty shillings and costs for selling spirituous liquors in the Victoria saloon, the point being that there was no licence. The court was crowded with theatrical people, and Games, who defended, made no attempt to contest the facts, but simply said that it was well known that such refreshments were on sale at all the other theatres, and that he was at a loss to divine why the Victoria should have been selected for the purpose of laying such an information. We shall probably not be far wrong in supposing that the Victoria's known bad character was the principal reason for making an example of it.

While all these things were going on at the Victoria, very important changes were being made in the law affecting theatres. Under the Theatres Act of 1843 the Victoria passed under the authority of the Lord Chamberlain for the granting of licences for the performance of stage plays. The Act defined stage plays as including "every tragedy, comedy, farce, opera, burletta, interlude, melodrama, pantomime, or other entertainment of the stage, or any part thereof." Thus the Victoria became as free to act Shakespeare as was Drury Lane itself, and the expression "minor theatres" lost its meaning and gradually went out of use. Unfortunately Osbaldiston did not take such advantage of his new situation as he might have done. Charles Knight was one of those who sternly rebuked the "Vic's" lack of morality. Writing in his "Penny Magazine," 1846, he said: "Look at our theatres; look at the houses all around them. Have they not given a taint to the very districts they belong to? The Coburg Theatre, now called the Victoria, and the Surrey, what are they? At Christmas time, at each of these minor theatres, may be seen such an appalling amount of loathsome vice and depravity as goes beyond Eugene Sue, and justifies the most astounding revelations of Smollett." Charles Mathews, too, had no high idea of place or people. "The

lower orders," he once wrote, "rush there in mobs, and in shirt-sleeves, applaud frantically, drink ginger-beer, munch apples, crack nuts, call the actors by their Christian names, and throw them orange-peel and apples by way of bouquets." This recalls the Porter's observation in "King Henry VIII." about "the youths that thunder at a play-house, and fight for bitter apples." In 1847 "The Theatrical Times" added its condemnation of the class of bill presented—a condemnation made all the more severe by its appearing in a professional paper:—"The vulgar and the ignorant, such as those who throng to the Victoria to witness atrocious melodramas fit only for an audience of felons, care not what an actor is so as he is but vociferous and tears a passion to rags. If a fellow without sense or education can but bellow like a coster-monger, it is sufficient to please in that elegant locality."

Edwin Hodder's testimony to the character of the house is to much the same effect as that of Hollingshead already quoted. Writing some years later he described the house as once "the focus of every form of vice. It was as Charles Kingsley says in 'Alton Locke'* 'the licensed pit of darkness, a trap of temptation—profligacy and ruin triumphantly yawning night after night.' The testimony of the police was unanimous, that it was hardly safe for decent people even to pass by it. 'Seldom a Saturday passed without seven or eight police cases, sometimes thirty or forty, and on Boxing Nights we have had to clear the gallery.' The bloodthirsty tragedies performed on the stage, with 'Bravo Hicks' as the hero; the wretched dramas of the 'Jack Sheppard' and 'Claude Duval' type; the unlimited sale of intoxicants between the acts, and the saturnalia in the streets at midnight, when the performances were over—combined to make the "Old Vic" a hotbed of crime." The policeman who found Alton Locke by night when he turned back to his mother's locked-up house chaffingly accused him of being "late home from the Victory," and Kingsley quotes two lines of a popular song of the period:

> Ven he's sitting in his glory
> Half-price at the Victory.

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*First published in 1850.

and the inference is in each case against the respectability of the patrons of the house.

In 1866, when Frampton and Fenton were the lessees, the performance began at seven o'clock. The programmes at this time were still long flimsy sheets with plenty of big black lettering, and George R. Sims says in his reminiscences, "My Life" (1916) that "however gingerly you handled those bills some of the black came off on you, and so it happened that when you wiped away a sympathetic tear with your finger you frequently left a black streak down your cheek. I once saw the audience turn out of the "Old Vic"—after the performance of an old-fashioned drama of the weepy-weepy order, and the faces of the crowd were a study in black and white."

CHAPTER VII.

The Turn of the Tide.

FIRES and alarms of fires have been a frequent source of danger in London theatres, both to building and audience, ever since Shakespeare's Globe perished in 1613. The Victoria did not go free. On the afternoon of Boxing Day, 1858, when a pantomime was being performed, a young man in the shilling seats struck a fusee match. Smoking was not allowed in the theatre, but it did sometimes happen that a man lit pipe or cigar, and the striking of a match was not, in itself, an occasion for alarm. The box, however, somehow became ignited, and the man dropped it on to the floor and extinguished it, but not before the sudden flame and smoke had been seen by a couple of women sitting near. They shouted "Fire!" In a moment the awful cry was taken up and the greatest excitement and confusion prevailed. The management and the staff, who appear to have acted with great promptitude and common-sense, succeeded in reassuring the audience almost at once, and order was restored throughout the house except in the gallery, which, perhaps, from its situation, was less easily reached by the staff than other parts of the building. It was occupied by young men and women, who are said to have numbered eight hundred. They saw the confusion below them and heard the alarm, and screaming "Fire! fire!" rushed down the broad main staircase leading to the street. But on this staircase were assembled some hundreds of other people, who were waiting for the evening performance, and the management had barricaded the staircase and had made arrangements for the afternoon gallery audience to leave by another way through the gallery saloon. In the excitement of the moment the terrified people forgot this exit, which must have been known to all the regular habitués of the house, and attempted to escape by the principal stairs. They tore aside the door and the barrier, and in a moment were involved in their downward rush with the crowd which was waiting to go up. There, during the next ten

minutes, on the stairs, in such awful circumstances, no fewer than sixteen lads in their teens, errand boys, apprentices and the like, were trampled to death or died of suffocation, and the tale of those not mortally injured included many more.

"Every chymist's and doctor's shop in the neighbourhood" says a contemporary account "was crowded with the dead and dying." J. Johnson Towers, the lessee and manager, gave evidence at the inquest to the effect that if the gallery people had gone out by the way provided for them, nothing would have happened. A verdict of accidental death was returned in all the cases, and Towers defrayed the funeral expenses, and informed the coroner that within the last six months he had spent £300 on strengthening and improving the very staircase on which the accident had happened. Some of the newspaper reports emphasized that the gallery patrons were low-class people, "rabble," and so forth; but the fact remains that not one girl or woman was named among the killed or in the published lists of those seriously injured; and it is clear, therefore, that there were among the "rabble" some who, in that sudden and frightful emergency, had the courage to protect those who were less well able to protect themseives.

An account of the "Vic": as it was about 1870 is contained in a monologue published in that year by Arthur Sketchley, a popular humourist. It was called "Mrs. Brown at the Play," and the play was a benefit night performance at the "Vic": Mrs. Brown was only persuaded to go when her husband explained to her that it was "Queen Victoria's werry own theayter;" but she had pleasant memories of having seen as a girl, no doubt at the same house, "a dark-coloured forriner set crossed-legged like a tailor, with a turbot on 'is 'ead, a-shyin' cheyney orringes round it afore a lookin'-glass, as were called Rammer Sammy."* After a good many halts en route for refreshments, the pair reached the theatre, which impressed Mrs. Brown as "rayther a ramshackle place for a Queen to go to constant," and with the assistance of a fatherly old man who was eating "penny-

*"I have seen, I say, the Hereditary Princess of Potztausend-Donnerwetter (that serenely beautiful woman) use her knife in lieu of a fork or spoon; I have seen her almost swallow it, by Jove! like Ramo Samee, the Indian juggler."—W. M. Thackeray, "Book of Snobs."

winkles" out of his pocket-handkerchief, and some others, Mrs. Brown got safely through the queue into the pit. The play was, of course, a melodrama with an incredibly beautiful heroine who, though poor and lowly proclaimed herself humble and innocent, and declared that she preferred innocence upon the mountain top to vice in the valley. It was not long before beauty became beauty in distress, with a couple of villains in her bedroom; and Mrs. Brown could bear no more.

"I says 'Brown,' I says, 'I'm your lawful wife, and the mother of children, and ain't a-goin' to set 'ere in cold blood and see murder done to please nobody.' And a party a-settin' near says ' 'Ush!'

"I says, 'Who are you a 'ushing? I shan't 'ush. There!'

"Says another feller, a-'ollerin' at me quite rude, 'Horder! horder!'

" 'Well' I says, 'suppose I did come with a horder, wot of that? Is that any reason I ain't to do my dooty by a fellow-creetur'?"

And then Mrs. Brown, determined to do what was right, called for the police; and a policeman assisted Mrs. Brown to the door, and having got her there, refused to allow her to go back to look for her umbrella. " 'Owever Queen Victoria can allow sich shameful goin's on at 'er theayter" was a puzzle to Mrs. Brown for the rest of her days.

In 1871 the auctioneer played a leading part upon the stage, but at Christmas the building was re-opened by a hopeful new proprietary as the Royal Victoria Palace Theatre. This fresh venture was not a success. On the 4th December, 1872, there was a benefit for those two celebrated pugilists Jem Mace and Barney Aaron. Mace was the last of the old-time ring champions and died in poverty in 1910 in his eightieth year. In March, 1874, there was another sale. The following is quoted from the advertisement:

"The approaches to the theatre are six in number, and afford ample and safe means by stone staircases for the rapid entrance and exit of crowded audiences, while the water supply is from five hydrants attached to the high pressure main service, and three large cisterns. The interior arrangements are complete, and include the noble, lofty, and well-ventilated auditorium, of unique design, rising to a height of fifty feet, decorated in the

Italian style, the walls being effectively lined with brilliant silvered plate-glass, and consisting of twelve large private boxes, 117 stalls, 119 balcony seats with promenade to hold 250 more, 560 in pit with promenade affording space for 400 more, and accomodation for 800 to 850 in gallery, thus affording, at present, accomodation for 2,300 persons, but with a judicious outlay it is calculated that additional sitting room may be obtained for 500 more visitors, thus giving a total audience of 2,800 persons. There are lofty, spacious, and appropriately decorated refreshment rooms adjoining the stalls, balcony, pit and gallery, the whole being lighted by 500 jet burners, fixed to the roof, in a ring 96 feet in circumference. The proscenium is an elliptic arch, of handsome character, 38 feet 6 inches wide and 34 feet high. The stage is of considerable dimensions, giving an area of 3,849 square feet."

Now the time was coming for the turning-point in the history of the house. In the summer of 1879 John Hollingshead went to the Coffee Palace Association with a proposition to turn the Victoria Theatre into a Coffee Music-Hall Palace, and circulars were drawn up and distributed for the purpose of making known the scheme. The following extracts are still of interest:

No. I.

"Many persons have for some time desired, and in various ways endeavoured, to provide for the working and lower middle classes recreation such as the music-hall affords, without the existing attendant moral and social disadvantages. It is believed that this may best be effected by opening music-halls in various parts of London, where the prices of admission shall be the same as at those now open, and at which a purified entertainment shall be given, and no intoxicating drinks be sold.

"It is not proposed to provide for a higher class of audience than that which at present frequents music-halls, but only to offer that class an entertainment which shall amuse without degrading them, and to which men may take their wives and children without shaming or harming them.

"Communications may be addressed to Miss Cons, Walmer Castle Coffee Tavern, 136, Seymour Place, Edgware Road."

No. II.

"The present Company has been formed to provide several large music-halls in various parts of London, at which a purified entertainment shall be given, and no intoxicant drinks be sold. The popularity of music-halls is shewn by the fact that in London alone, to say nothing of the large provincial towns, they exist, as compared with theatres, in the proportion of eight to one.

"The visitors at these places are essentially family visitors; that is to say, men go to them and take their wives and children, whereas if they go to a public-house or a coffee tavern they generally go alone.

"It has long been felt that the influence of the existing music-halls is for the most part far from elevating or refining. General complaints have recently been made as to the inpropriety of many songs now sung at these places, and the present Home Secretary, Mr. Cross, has just addressed a circular letter on this subject to the licensing magistrates.

"The necessary music licences, now refused in all cases by the magistrates to new applicants for ordinary music-halls, will, there is every reason to believe, be readily granted to this Company for the purposes specified."

It was at one time contemplated that Hollingshead, who was a member of the provisional board, should be the managing director of the entertainments. "The scheme" he tells us in "My Lifetime," "was not matured without some difficulty, and eventually I found that my connection with the Gaiety Theatre was not considered a good and safe qualification for me to take a leading part in carrying out my idea. Being a philosopher, I left it in the capable hands of Miss Cons, and have watched its rise and well-deserved progress with that interest which an abandoned parent takes in the career of a prosperous and proper child."

At this point Miss Cons entered the history of the old house, and her close connection with it subsisted until her death more than thirty years afterwards.

"During all these years" recorded the public notice then drawn up by the executive committee "her wonderful enthusiasm, sympathy and devotion never failed, and were the cause of the remarkable success which has attended the Hall from the beginning to the present time." Emma Cons was born in 1838, and as a young woman became an art student. She had the good for-

tune to meet John Ruskin, who saw some of her work and advised her as to a career, and she would in all probability have become an artist had she not met Octavia Hill, who inspired her with an interest in social problems in general and the better housing of the working classes in particular. The Victoria Hall, where the work she began is now maintained under the management of her niece, is one of the permanent memorials of her effort. From 1880 to the time of her death she was managing director of the South London Dwellings Company. Surrey Lodge was their principal undertaking, and Miss Cons living, as she did, on the spot was able to exercise a great influence for good upon the tenants, and she was often appealed to late at night to protect a woman from the violence of a drunken husband. She performed in addition an enormous amount of social work, especially in Lambeth, which the people among whom she lived gladly and gratefully recognised. In 1889 she was elected an Alderman of the first London County Council in recognition of her social work, but it was found that women were not at that time legally qualified to sit. Miss Cons' interest in the provision of rational entertainment arose out of her housing work. "Continually on Monday mornings when she collected her rents," writes one who knew her well, "black eyes were numerous. On enquiring the reason of this Monday carnage, she found that the men frequented music-halls on Saturday nights and drank intoxicating liquors the whole time as they listened to comic songs and foolery. They rolled home at midnight and beat their wives and little ones. Miss Cons felt it was necessary to found a music-hall on temperance lines."

In 1879-80 it was decided that the "Old Vic" should be the scene of the experiment in providing this purified entertainment, and Sir Julius Benedict, Carl Rosa and (Sir) Arthur Sullivan all joined the council of the Coffee Music-Halls Company which had been formed for the purposes of the work. About £3,000 was spent on alterations to the building and on its re-decoration, and the front of it was fitted up as a coffee-tavern which, the intention was, should be open to the public during the day and not only at night. The magistrates approved the plans and granted the licences, and on Boxing Day, Monday, the 27th December, 1880, the house was

opened as the Royal Victorian Coffee Music-Hall. A variety programme was presented which included Dutch Daley, who is still to be found giving his entertainment to-day, and Miss Cons' manager was W. J. Bullock. His tenure of office was, however, but a short one, and in 1881 he was succeeded by Mr. William Poel, who remained until 1883, when he became for a few months stage-manager to (Sir) F. R. Benson.

The entertainment presented by the Vic. at this time was of a decidedly miscellaneous character, but there were two principal sheet-anchors in each week's arrangements; a concert on Thursdays, for which a first-rate military band was occasionally engaged, and a penny lecture of an instructive and improving nature on Fridays. Sometimes instead of a lecture, there was a temperance meeting, with or without music. On three or four other nights there was either a variety entertainment or something approximating to a regular theatrical triple bill. At Christmas, 1882, for instance, the Hall announced: "THE GIRDLE DUELLISTS; or, the Viking's Return," an Original Military Spectacle, produced with New Scenery and Costumes, 200 performers —the most Impressive and Original Spectacle ever produced in South London. Second edition of ARCADIA, with new Specialities. The Harlequinade produced by the celebrated Clown, Mr. Duelin. Prices from 3d. to £1 1s." The Hall began to lose its bad reputation, and a reporter of "The Era," a stage newspaper, who ventured over there "found whole families taking their tea and coffee and enjoying the performances, and it was most creditable to the establishment and to the visitors to witness such good order and good humour. All were well behaved."

It had been the hope at the outset that the Hall would be self-supporting, and even that it would perhaps pay a dividend, but this pious aspiration very soon proved ill-founded, and the company which had been formed was wound up by voluntary liquidation. A new committee was formed, subscriptions were received, and it was determined to re-organize the work on a different plan, namely, to improve the quality of the performances, and to devote certain evenings to ballad concerts, temperance meetings and science lectures, as well as to the variety entertainments.

CHAPTER VIII.

After a Hundred Years.

ABOUT the year 1882 the affairs of the Hall began to engage the attention of Samuel Morley*, M.P. for Bristol, a textiles manufacturer who had derived great wealth out of his business and had attained remarkable prominence by reason of his benevolence and his long-continued work as a social reformer. The Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII., said of him after his death: "He endeared his name to all of our countrymen, and will go down to posterity as one of the greatest philanthropists of the age."

In 1884, when the work seemed to be almost on the point of collapsing, Morley joined the executive committee. Towards the purchase of the lease of the building he and a lady each contributed £1,000, and the influence of his name and example was largely instrumental in securing the other £2,000 which was included in the required sum. Morley's interest grew and deepened and he began to take an active part in the work of the Hall and, as he said, "qualified himself for partnership" with Miss Cons. "Indeed it was a happy partnership for us," she wrote, "as his clear head and warm, sympathetic heart were always a tower of strength to us against worries and petty troubles which fritter away one's powers. His speeches aroused public attention, so that money and helpers came to our aid, and I was thankful not to have to claim his oft-repeated promises, 'Now, don't you worry about money. I will not let this important work flag for want of that. It is not fair that you workers should be troubled on that score.' He took such interest in every detail that, in spite of his many engagements, he continually made little appointments to see me and consult about matters

* For much information about the Hall at this time I am indebted to "The Life of Samuel Morley," by Edwin Hodder (1889).

rather than trust to letter discussions. Then he would run into the Hall for an hour, and see what lecture or other entertainment was going on, and his rare keen enjoyment was quite refreshing to us who are tired out with such things. . . One night, when he was going into the club-rooms to address the men, he ran back to laughingly beg me 'not to have the boy's head cut off until he came back to see it.' This referred to the performance of a conjuror we had at that time, who, amongst his tricks, cleverly pretended to cut off a boy's head and put it on again." A meeting to hear an account of the work was held under the presidency of the Duke of Westminster, grandfather of the present peer, at Grosvenor House, when Morley moved a resolution and spoke at some length about the Hall. "I honestly believe," he said, "this movement to deserve the utmost support we can give it. I have given some proof of it by joining heartily a band who are determined to stand by Miss Cons.

"I have been to the Victoria Hall several times. I don't know that I have ever laughed so much as on these occasions. I believe in good hearty laughter, it tends to health. The proceedings have consisted of music, fun, and temperance addresses. The great object of these attractive entertainments is to win people from the public-house. I have seen thousands listening to good music. On one occasion tumblers occupied the stage. I am not a theatre-goer, but I did most heartily enjoy the real fun, absolutely divested of anything gross or immoral.

"What we want is an extended partnership—more partners in an enterprise which involves no liability. This partnership can bring only satisfaction, because the work is already proved by results which afford ample compensation for any pecuniary outlay you may make; for 240,000 persons attended the Victoria Hall during last year. Out of that vast number, many must have been won to a better life by the kind of entertainments offered, including as they do admirable lectures, which are listened to with deepest interest by large audiences."

Mr. Samuel Morley's death the next year was a serious blow to the progress of the work, for he brought to it not only very generous financial assistance, unfailing sympathy, and the practical help which his great

EMMA CONS,
Founder of the Royal Victoria Hall, People's Palace for London, 1880.

skill in business matters enabled him to render, but much aid of a very valuable nature for his influence was a source of inspiration to others. A scheme successfully carried out in memory of him is permanently recorded in the lobby inside the balcony entrance in the New Cut, which, by the way, faces an old-established baker's shop prominently proclaiming itself The Original Victoria Bun House. The following inscription is there incised in gilt letters on a white marble tablet: "In memory of one who held his wealth in trust for the benefit of others irrespective of class or creed, Samuel Morley, M.P., born October 9th, 1809, died September 6th, 1886, the freehold of this Hall and of the adjoining College was bought by public subscription in 1888 and devoted to the benefit and enjoyment of the people for ever."

The " Old Vic " has also played an important part in public education, for here illustrated lantern and scientific experimental lectures were first initiated. Already, in 1883, anticipating the Polytechnics, Science Classes were held in the dressing and paint rooms behind the stage, and as the gratifying result of these classes, a plasterer's labourer gained a scholarship at Cambridge, a rag and paper sorter is now a Chief Engineer on a P. and O. liner; and several clerks among the early students have risen high in their profession, one even to knighthood.

One of the early lecturers was William Lant Carpenter, who in the days when telephones were unknown to the general public, took as his subject: " How to Talk with a Man in New York." Out of this, at the entreaty of two men in the audience, the Morley College for Working Men and Women, now numbering 1,113 students has grown. Its first Vice-Principal was Miss Caroline Martineau, Miss Cons' devoted friend and co-worker.

Audiences varying from 500 to 2,000, as on the occasion of the visit of Sir Ernest Shackleton, attend the " Old Vic " Tuesday after Tuesday to hear the leading scientists, travellers, and public men of the day.

Many entertaining memories of these times can be recalled by Mr. Robinson, the stage carpenter of the house, who began his connection with it on his nineteenth birthday, the 13th March, 1881, and has been at his post ever since.

Though this is principally a history of the dramatic work of the theatre for a century; its operas and concerts during the last thirty years have been called "The nation's finest musical asset." Artistes who have won distinction far and wide have sung and played and recited at the " Old Vic "—to mention but a few: Belle Cole, Ada Crossley, Lily Hanbury, Alice Gomez, Madame Patey, Ella Russell, Antoinette Sterling, Ben Davies, Signor Foli, the Meister Glee Singers, Tividar Nachez, Sims Reeves, Charles Santley, W. H. Squire, the Westminster Singers.

In 1889 concert performances of grand opera were given with tableaux representing the scenes. Seven years later a small chorus was formed, and from that day the representations have steadily improved, and the " Old Vic " company holds its own with any touring company. The following is the list of operas which have been presented up to the present time:—

AUBER—"Fra Diavolo."
BALFE—"The Bohemian Girl," "The Rose of Castille."
BENEDICT—"The Lily of Killarney."
BIZET—"Carmen."
DONIZETTI—"Lucia di Lammermoor," "The Daughter of the Regiment."
VON FLOTOW—"Martha."
GOUNOD—"Faust."
LEONCAVALLO—"I Pagliacci."
MASCAGNI—"Cavalleria Rusticana."
MENDELSSOHN—"Elijah" (Oratorio in action). Staged by Ben Greet.
MOZART—"Don Giovanni," "The Marriage of Figaro."
THOMAS—"Mignon."
VERDI—"Rigoletto," "La Traviata," "Il Trovatore."
WAGNER—"Tannhauser," "Lohengrin."
WALLACE—"Maritana."

The operas are given on Thursday and Saturday evenings and every fortnight on Saturday afternoon, and are rendered by really good operatic principals, a professional orchestra, chorus and small ballet, whose devotion is beyond words. The first conductor was Alfred Dove, now Musical Director at the London

Coliseum and the Stoll Halls, and his successor is Charles Corri, who has been at the " Old Vic " for eighteen years.

The following are amongst those who have taken the leading rôles during the last three years: Alexia Bassian, Florence Barrow, Marie Benda, Gladys Van de Beeck, Julie Carole, Alice Esty, Eleanor Felix, Muriel Gough, Winifred Ludlam, Mabel Manson, Amy Martin, Adelaide Mullen, Blanche Gaston-Murray, Maud Santley, Euneta Truscott, Palgrave Turner, Gleeson-White, Dorothy Wiley, Maude Wilby, Constance Willis, George Baker, Henry Beaumont, Ewart Beech, Frederick Blamey, Robert Curtis, James Davis, Alan Engles, Dawson Freer, S. Harrison (Stage Manager), Herbert Heyner, Frederick Hudson, Leo Pestkowski, Frederick Ranalow, John Ridding, Shakespeare Stewart, Dillon Shallard, Hedley Strutt, Edmund Starkey, Charles Victor.

In October, 1905, a series of symphony concerts was begun and these were successfully given for four years or more.

Continuous interest has been shewn by three generations of Royalty. Queen Victoria on several occasions sent messages to Miss Cons through Princess Henry of Battenberg, Her Majesty's youngest daughter, who was present on the 6th December, 1899, at a patriotic concert in aid of a fund for the wives and children of reservist soldiers then serving in South Africa. Among those who gave their services and took part in the entertainment were Mme. Belle Cole and John Thomas, harpist to Queen Victoria. King Edward and Queen Alexandra, as Prince and Princess of Wales, visited the Hall, and Princess Christian, another of Queen Victoria's daughters, has visited it many times, and on one of these occasions with characteristic kindness became its Patron and President. One of her visits was paid on the 9th May, 1912, when "Tannhauser" was given, and when, during an interval, she received purses on the stage to the amount of nearly £200, and the work done at the Hall was warmly commended by the Bishop of Southwark (Dr. Burge) and the Rev. Dr. John Scott Lidgett, the eminent social reformer and divine.

That was the last occasion Miss Cons was to be seen on the stage; less than three months later she had passed away. She died at the age of seventy-four years, on the 24th July, 1912, at Chippen's Bank, Hever, the home

of a friend of very many years' standing. The following telegram was despatched from Buckingham Palace at this time:

"The King and Queen have heard with regret of the death of Miss Cons, whom they so well remember meeting at the Royal Victoria Hall, and for whose self-sacrificing life Their Majesties had a high regard. Please express Their Majesties' sympathy with her relations and colleagues.—Stamfordham."

The reference was to a visit to a ballad concert which Their Majesties paid as Prince and Princess of Wales on the 3rd March, 1910, a couple of months only before King George's Accession to the Throne. They had been interested in the "Vic" by Lady Frederick Cavendish and her sister, the Hon. Mrs. Talbot, active helpers in the work since 1884. The evening was a great success in every way, Miss Cons presented the Princess with a bouquet, and amongst other distinguished visitors were Mrs. Randall Davidson (the wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury) and the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. Nor was the gracious Royal message the only notice officially taken of the close of Miss Cons' exceptionally useful life. At the next meeting of the London County Council most appreciative allusions were made to her work and worth by Lord Cheylesmore, Lady St. Helier, and many public bodies and others, and the Lambeth Borough Council accorded her relatives a vote of condolence. It was said of her after her death that never was her name spoken in South London without affection and respect. A large photographic portrait now hangs in the first tier; it was unveiled in 1914 by Princess Christian, who was accompanied by Princess Henry of Battenberg.

Miss Lilian Baylis, Miss Cons' niece, who had been acting manager since March, 1898, now became lessee and manager, and an appeal for funds for the carrying on, more particularly of the musical part of the Hall's activities was issued by a number of leading musicians with the support of Princess Christian, the Lord Mayor of London (Sir David Burnett), and the Chairman of the London County Council (Mr. C. S. Cobb). The other signatories were (Sir) Thomas Beecham, Mr. Arthur

Fagge, Mr. Edward German, Mr. Allen Gill, Mr. Charles Manners, Mme. Fanny Moody Manners, Mme. Melba (who paid the Hall a surprise visit on the 26th March, 1914, and made a donation of £50, as a token of her appreciation), Mr. Percy Pitt, and Sir Henry J. Wood. The appeal was in the following terms:—

"The Royal Victoria Hall (formerly the Victoria Theatre, and still earlier "The Coburg") has since 1880 been an artistic oasis in the dismal district around Waterloo Station and the New Cut. On every Thursday evening from October to May, takes place either a performance of Grand Opera, or a concert, while on Tuesdays, Science and Travel Lectures are given.

"The audiences are large (especially on Opera nights, when often more than 2,000 are present), and in the matter of attention and appreciation can hold their own with those at Covent Garden, Drury Lane, or Queen's Hall. As the prices of admission are low (ranging from 2d. to 1s.), and only Artistes of good standing are engaged, the work cannot exist without liberal help from outside.

"With the inevitable loss during the past thirty years of most of the little band of enthusiasts to whom the work owes its inception, this help has become increasingly difficult to obtain, and through the recent death of Miss Emma Cons, the Founder, who was Honorary Secretary for so many years, we are faced with a financial crisis.

"We have the fine Hall, the organisation, and the enthusiastic audiences. Shall these three assets be wasted for want of funds? If only one half of those who attend regularly Opera and Concerts in more fashionable surroundings will send us the sum which only one evening's enjoyment costs them, we shall have the answer we want. It means so little to them, but so much to us and our humble patrons. Whether these latter are to look to us in the future, as in the past, to provide them with an alternative to less cultured entertainments must depend upon the response to this appeal.

"The interest on the sum of say £5,000 would provide the necessary amount for carrying on the work.*

"Donations and subscriptions to be forwarded to Lilian Baylis, who will gladly give further particulars."*

*As a result of this appeal only £800 were collected when war broke out. Funds are still urgently needed.

Though constantly hampered by lack of money, Miss Baylis boldly endeavoured to bring Shakespeare to the people, in February, 1912, with the help of two members of the Lawrence Irving's Company, but the plans fell through. Early in 1914 arrangements were made with Miss Rosina Filippi for a short season in which a scheme for what was called " The People's Theatre " was put to the practical test. The results were disappointing, and it was clear that other methods were required. Miss Baylis accordingly made a second attempt, and between October, 1914, and April, 1915—the first Winter of the European War—a stock company was formed, with the co-operation of Mr. and Mrs. Matheson Lang and Miss Estelle Stead, and performances were given of thirteen of Shakespeare's plays. In the next two seasons, despite War conditions, seven more of Shakespeare's plays, besides other works, were added to the list which for the three seasons is as follows :—

DICKENS (adapted by Russell Thorndike)—"A Christmas Carol."

GOLDSMITH—"She Stoops to Conquer."

HERZ (adapted)—"King René's Daughter."

LYTTON—"The Lady of Lyons."

SHAKESPEARE—"A Midsummer Night's Dream," "As You Like It," "Hamlet," "Julius Cæsar," "King Richard the Second," "King Henry the Fifth" (staged in the Elizabethan manner on the five-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt), "King Richard the Third," "King Henry the Eighth," "Macbeth," "Much Ado About Nothing," "Othello," "Romeo and Juliet," "The Comedy of Errors," "The Merchant of Venice," "The Merry Wives of Windsor," "The Taming of the Shrew," "The Tempest," "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," "The Winter's Tale," "Twelfth Night."

SHERIDAN—"Saint Patrick's Day," "The Critic," "The Rivals," "The School for Scandal."

RUSSELL THORNDIKE and GEOFFREY WILKINSON—"A New-Cut Harlequinade."

MORALITY PLAYS—"Everyman," "The Star of Bethlehem."

As one of the means of making the Shakespeare venture known, the management invited eminent actors

and actresses to address the audiences on Saturday nights before the opera. Those who spoke were Miss Lena Ashwell, Sir Frank Benson, Miss Hutin Britton, Miss Constance Collier, Mrs. Edward Compton, Mr. Ben Greet, Mrs. Kendal, Mr. Matheson Lang, Miss Nancy Price, Sir Herbert Tree, and Miss May Whitty.

The courageous experiment was justified by results; the audiences increased in size; wide public and professional attention followed the growth of the repertory; and the theatre became the focus of more interest than it had been for many years. Shakespeare's Birthday 1915 was honoured by a special matinée at which a number of leading actors and actresses appeared, and in April, 1916, there was a grand Shakespeare Tercentenary performance that will always be memorable in the annals of the house for the fact that there then appeared upon its stage, each for the first time, Miss Ellen Terry and Miss Mary Anderson. A little later the Governors of the Shakespeare Memorial at Stratford-upon-Avon engaged the company to play throughout the four weeks' Tercentenary Summer Festival in Shakespeare's native town. Mr. Ben Greet has been stage director and has produced the plays, almost from the beginning when three plays were produced by Mr. and Mrs. Matheson Lang (Miss Hutin Britton); and it is Mr. Greet's work which has contributed in great measure to the success of what was, at first, avowedly an experiment. Three evening performances and two matinées a week are given, with the addition of certain extra matinées to meet the demand for seats for certain plays, especially from children attending the London County Council elementary schools, who are brought to the theatre in great numbers by their teachers; such attendance at a Shakespeare performance counting as an attendance at school.

Appended is a list of members and guests of the company who appeared during these three historic seasons:—

Henry Ainley, Robert Atkins, Orlando Barnett, Ernest Bodkin, Harry Burge, William Farren, Arthur Fayne, Basil Gill, A. Corney Grain, Edwin Greenwood, Lynn Harding, H. B. Irving, Henry Kendall, Patrick Kirwan, Andrew Leigh, Victor Lewisohn, Ernest Meads, Norman V. Norman, Terence O'Brien, Robert Percival, Eric Ross, George Somnes, William Stack, Mark Stanley,

W. R. Staveley, Leonard Thackeray, Russell Thorndike, E. A. Walker, J. Fisher White, Geoffrey Wilkinson, Royston Wood, Duncan Yarrow.

Mary Anderson, Hutin Britton, Lilian Braithwaite, Phyllis Bryan, Katherine Carew, Agnes Carter, Muriel de Castro, Joan Chard, Constance Collier, Sylva Fausset, Adela Foote, Gladys Foote, Mildred Foote, Veronica Foote, Clare Greet, Margaret Halstan, Doris Keys, Gwen Lally, Ray Litvin, Mona Maughan, Winifred Oughton, Claire Pauncefort, Florence Saunders, Blanche Stanley, Estelle Stead, Mary Sumner, Margaret Sutcliffe, Rhoda Symons, Ellen Terry, Sybil Thorndike, Viola Tree, Olive Walter, Madge Whiteman, Stella Wilkinson, Beatrice Wilson.

Performances were also given in 1915, '16, and '17 by the stock company at the Excelsior Hall, Bethnal Green, and at the North London Polytechnic, with very considerable success at both places.

Sailors and soldiers have always been admitted at half-price. During the War the house did not shrink from doing what it could to be of public use. Many wounded soldiers and refugees from the stricken countries of our Allies did the "Vic" invite as guests, and provide with cheerful and much appreciated dramatic or musical entertainment, and on a number of occasions the use of the building was given free of charge for patriotic demonstrations and recruiting meetings.

Such is the varied history of a house now nearly one hundred years old. With the exception of Drury Lane, which dates back to 1812, but has been largely rebuilt, it is the oldest of all the London theatres now standing and in regular use as a theatre. It has undergone several changes of name, many changes of management, and more than the ordinary vicissitudes that are the common lot of theatrical enterprise. Never has it appealed to a wider or a more intelligent public than now; never has it been conducted on a basis of higher ideals; never has it deserved better. When the West End is given over to farce and revue, "Cross the river" says "The Times," "and at the famous "Old Vic" you will find on five nights of the week either a play by Shakespeare or an opera in progress; and the "Old Vic" generally counts its attendance in four figures." To which need only be added: Prosperity to the "Old Vic" and may " Old Vic's " e'er long be found in many parts of the land.

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